



THE INDEPENDENT

N° 3228

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 1997

WEATHER: Heavy showers and strong winds

(IR45p) 40p

INSIDE THE TABLOID

MEDIA+

- Ralph Steadman draws Tory blood
 - Television's Mr Clean
 - The poshest family in journalism
- PLUS: 12 pages of media and marketing appointments



ARTS

Children take over
at Glyndebourne

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Tories clear decks for May poll

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

John Major will clear the decks for a 1 May election today with a meeting of senior Cabinet ministers in Downing Street to approve the Conservative election manifesto.

The Prime Minister has ordered the Government's business managers to ensure that its four main law-and-order bills get Royal Assent early next month to avoid the need for horse-trading with Tony Blair in the run-up to polling day.

And to put Labour on the defensive on education the Government is planning to force a re-run in the Commons of the vote on the Education Bill to give parents the power to expand grant-maintained schools, which it lost by one vote when a whip added up incorrectly.

Ministerial leave has been cancelled for a full-scale Commons vote tonight by Labour over the state of the National Health Service, forcing Michael Portillo, the Secretary of State for Defence, to cut to a few hours a visit to Hong Kong before flying to Brunneron Wednesday on an arms-trade mission.

To head-off any attempt to bring the Government down before 1 May, Sir Patrick Mayhew, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, is expected to announce in the next fortnight new powers for the Northern Ireland grand committee, to meet in Belfast before the election, a move which the Ulster Unionists have been demanding.

Pledges in the manifesto, drafted by David Willetts, chairman of the Tory research department, will include a commitment to send in "hit squads" to take over council housing estates, where there is evidence that councils are failing in their duty.

Some controversial plans,

such as the privatisation of Channel 4, have been put off. The privatisation of the London Underground is expected to be announced before the election, ready for action if the Tories are re-elected. A Ministry of Agriculture consultation paper on options for reducing Britain's strict anti-rabies measures for

Today also marks the last date for the Prime Minister to call a snap election on 20 March, but the message from the Conservative rally in Birmingham was that the Tories' hope of winning now rests on delay, to give more time for economic recovery to translate into votes.

Tony Blair is making an unprecedented second visit to the by-election in South Wirral today, and Brian Mawhinney, the Tory Party chairman, gave a clear hint that the Tories expect defeat in Thursday's poll. "There is a well-established by-election phenomenon and I'm not going to pretend that that doesn't show signs of happening in the Wirral as elsewhere," he said.

Labour has abandoned any plans of forcing a no-confidence vote to demand an election after the by-election result. "There is no point, unless we can guarantee to get the Ulster Unionist voting with us," said a Labour source.

The Tory high command returned from the Birmingham rally encouraged by improved morale among party workers, to focus on closing the gap with Labour. Tomorrow they were planning to return to the attack on Labour over the economy, but that was undermined yesterday by Sir Edward Heath, the former Conservative Prime Minister, who infuriated Tory MPs by endorsing Labour's support for the European social chapter, the minimum wage, and the Scottish parliament.

If Labour wins the election, John Prescott, the deputy Labour leader, is expected to be made Deputy Prime Minister, and is likely to take over a newly merged Department of the Environment and Transport, with charge of local councils and implementing regional policy.

Heath condemned, page 4

Leading article, page 14

Gallery thieves go fishing to haul in a lady

Andrew Gumbel
Rome

What does it take to steal a famous painting? To judge by the latest heist to hit the world's beleaguered art market this weekend, not much: good timing, a healthy dose of chutzpah, some poor museum security and a fishing rod.

The missing painting in question is *Portrait of a Lady*, a late work by Gustav Klimt, which normally hangs on the walls of a gallery in Piacenza in northern Italy. Until, an as-yet unspecified point last week, there were three Klimts in Italy; by now, it is a fair guess to say there are only two.

The thieves could not have picked a more vulnerable target. The Ricci-Oddi Gallery was in a state of upheaval since the tree weasel, it is believed to have completely died out in England and Wales where it was common less than 200 years ago.

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Tree weasel's return.

Ecologists are preparing the way for the first-ever reintroduction of a carnivore into England. The pine marten, which is also known as the tree weasel, is believed to have completely died out in England and Wales where it was common less than 200 years ago.

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Mass Paris march.

More than 100,000 people marched through Paris at the weekend to protest against a proposed new law to control illegal immigration. Page 10

TV turns serious.

In an unprecedented move, the American network NBC broadcast the film *Schindler's List*, which depicts the Holocaust and is more than two hours long, without a single advertising break.

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Towering inferno: Firefighters tackling the blaze at the 36-storey hotel in Bangkok yesterday

90 escape tower blaze

Michael Streeter

Bangkok fire crews battled for nearly four hours to rescue more than 90 workers trapped when flames engulfed a 36-storey building yesterday.

Three people died when two explosions rocked the new hotel and office complex, two of them after jumping from the seventh floor to escape the flames. Another victim survived the leap but was seriously ill in hospital last night.

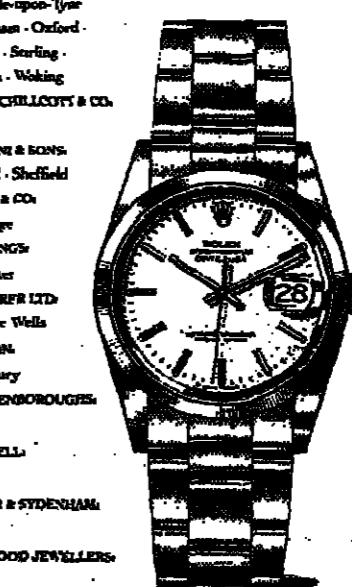
Workers said they heard two explosions from the seventh floor of the President Tower

where colleagues were installing air-conditioners. One of those rescued, said: "I was on the eighth floor when I heard two big explosions. I rushed down to the staircase and found many people jammed there. Many of them rushed to the top floor."

Up to seven helicopters, hampered by dense smoke and strong winds, took turns dropping ladders and safety-harnesses to workers, who were then winched to safety. Sakorn Sritoe, 28, who was on the 33rd floor when the fire began, said: "People were so frightened, some of them sounded like they had gone mad, and screamed for help. About an hour later we were picked up."

A colleague, Noi, 25, who was

among those trapped on the top floor, said some fainted from the intense heat and had to be revived. More than a dozen others scrambled to safety using ropes to climb down from the middle of the building, which was being decorated. All but six of the 92 people taken to hospital were later discharged. Casualties were kept down because light Sunday traffic allowed emergency vehicles to rush to the scene.



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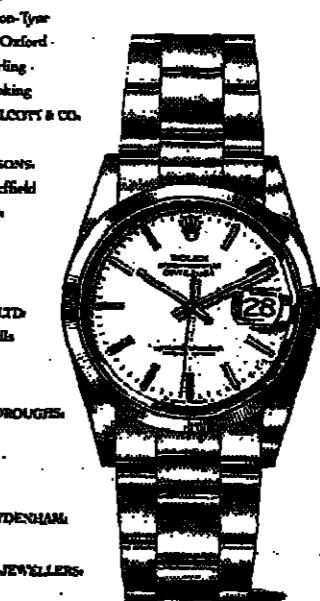
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news

significant shorts

POA warns of security danger at Broadmoor

Security at Broadmoor special hospital, which houses some of the country's most dangerous criminals, is at "breaking point", according to a new report by the Prison Officers' Association.

The report - sent to Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health, a week ago - warns of a "dangerous" situation. Andy Gossage, who chairs the POA's special hospitals group, and the author of the report, said yesterday: "We're concerned about abuse of privileges by patients, dangerous staffing levels, the amount of staff leaving the job, and the amount of inexperienced staff coming into the job, which makes it dangerous."

The POA has asked Mr Dorrell - who has ordered an inquiry into paedophile allegations at Ashworth Special Hospital, Merseyside - to investigate the problems at Broadmoor and England's other top security hospital, Rampton, as well. But a Department of Health said there were no plans to do so.

Bellamy joins Referendum Party

The naturalist and environmental campaigner David Bellamy has given the Referendum Party a boost by agreeing to stand against John Major in his Huntingdon constituency at the general election. Dr Bellamy (pictured) who joins zookeeper John Aspinall and actor Edward Fox as high-profile supporters, has eagerly embraced the philosophy of the party set up by Sir James Goldsmith. He said:

"I am worried about the sovereignty of the country I have lived in for 63 years becoming part of a Federal State of Europe. People have died to keep this country's democracy but that is now being eroded. When I read the Referendum Party's material I thought it can't really be as bad as that but I came to the conclusion that it was." Thomas Harding

Minister in gay marriage plea

A Government minister has called for gay couples to be allowed to enter into a legal contract similar to marriage.

Speaking on Radio 5 Live's gay programme *Out This Week*, transport minister John Bowis said: "There are difficulties in quite a lot of areas of social law in that there isn't a legal contract in gay relationship, any more than there is in an unmarried heterosexual relationship. It may be that if one is able to achieve some sort of legal contract that would provide a stability." Asked if that was something he would like to see, he replied: "That is something I'd like to see, yes." Mr Bowis, who is married with three children, has repeatedly condemned prejudice against homosexuality and supports the reduction of the age of homosexual consent to 16.

Road protester in treehouse blaze

A road protester was in a "poorly" condition in hospital last night after suffering serious burns when his treehouse caught fire. Stephen Anderson, 39, was injured when the two-level tree dwelling caught fire at a road protest camp at Rye Loaf Hill, Bingley, West Yorkshire. The fire is believed to have been sparked accidentally by a butane gas lighter.

Midland banks on new identity

Midland Bank began the process of banishing its familiar yellow and blue griffin logo from high streets yesterday with newspaper advertisements welcoming readers to the "new" Midland Bank. At a cost of around £1.5m, Midland is introducing what it calls a "smart new corporate identity", symbolised by a simple red and white hexagon. The logo belongs to HSBC, the banking giant which bought Midland in 1992 for £3.9bn, and will eventually appear on all Midland products from stationery to cheque books.

Very significant shorts for Navy

Summer has come early for the men and women of the Royal Navy in Hong Kong - and they are not amused. Military commanders in the colony have issued an order that summer uniforms have to be worn with immediate effect, and for the Navy that means standard white shorts and long socks, even though the weather in February can be chilly. A military spokesman said the decision stemmed from the arrival of the Black Watch as the last Army battalion before the handover. "It was decided that, as they were coming for just a few months, it would greatly reduce the amount of clothing they needed to bring if they wore summer uniform. Consequently, all forces now have to wear summer uniform."

Eight share Lottery jackpot

Saturday's National Lottery jackpot of £7,335,320 will be shared by eight winners, all of whom win £916,915. Thirty-seven punters with five numbers plus the bonus ball, each win £61,000; 1,912 tickets with five winning numbers get £737; 88,555 tickets with four correct numbers win £35; 1,416,605 ticketholders win £10 for three correct numbers. The winning numbers were 5, 23, 8, 1, 9, 27; bonus ball 22.

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NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING

Recycled paper made up 41.2% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1996

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people

briefing

HOME AFFAIRS

Irish face discrimination in criminal justice system

Members of the Irish community in mainland Britain are subject to widespread discrimination in the criminal justice system, according to research published today. The report - published by a consortium including the National Association of Probation Officers, the Bourne Trust and the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas - claims that those of Irish descent are more likely to be stopped by police in inner cities than any other ethnic group.

Furthermore, the research claims that the Irish are the group most likely to be the victim of a street crime and are disproportionately represented among miscarriages of justice.

The 56 case histories used in the report detail many instances of stop, search and overnight detention under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which generally resulted in release without charge. Others reveal inappropriate remands into custody, longer sentences than normal and the harassment of Irish travellers.

UNIONS

Membership declining fast

Trade unions need to recruit 500,000 members before the millennium if they are to halt a long-term decline in membership, according to a report out today. Membership has slipped by more than 1.7 million since 1989 and stood at 7.3 million in 1995.

Unions need to target new sectors to stem the fall, said the report.

Facing the Future, drawn up by the TUC.

It blamed the drop on the decline in manufacturing industry,

more part-time and temporary jobs, high unemployment and a hostile political climate during the 1980s which led to anti-union legislation.

Union membership fell most dramatically among male and manual employees and those in production industries, the report added. Membership levels among women, part-time workers and non-manual employees have been less affected.

The report said unions ought to target the growing sectors of employment including professionals, women and part-time workers, as well as those in personal and protective services, which are set to soar by the year 2001.



EDUCATION

Failure to cut teenage pregnancy

Sex education too little and too late, and is failing the nation's young people, claim the authors of research published today. More open discussion of sex could cut teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, delay the average age that youngsters become sexually active and lead to better use of contraceptives, according to a survey funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

The authors of the report called for the provision of more family planning clinics geared specifically towards young people, and dealing with controversial issues like homosexuality and abortion.

Comparison of British and Dutch youngsters showed that those in Holland - where teenage pregnancy rates are considerably lower - had earlier and more open sex education, both at the home and at school. The Dutch youngsters had more confidence discussing sex, contraception and the dangers of HIV with partners before intercourse and had more close friends of the opposite sex.

The survey involved 280 interviews and an analysis of more than 17,500 teenage pregnancies in the Wessex area between 1991 and 1994.

ECONOMY

Poor links to air and sea ports

Britain's economic success is threatened by poor road links to air and sea ports, says a report out today. A special fund should be set up by the Government to implement the schemes to "unblock the arteries that sustain continued economic prosperity", said the British Road Federation.

The federation also called for a greater proportion of the growth tax taken from transport users to be specifically used to improve the nation's infrastructure.

The report said UK ports handled 550m tonnes of freight in 1995 - a 100-tonne increase on 1985, as well as 1.6m goods vehicles, 7.6m cars and 235,000 buses and coaches. Meanwhile, UK airports handled 115m passengers in 1995 - 87 per cent more than in 1985, while freight-handling rose 105 per cent, from 802,000 tonnes in 1985 to 1,611m tonnes in 1995.

If Terminal 5 was built at Heathrow airport, it added, further improvements would be needed to public transport and roads, over and above those already proposed. There was also need for better links to Manchester airport, which is to get a new runway.

NATURE

Threat to swans remains

Swans face a growing threat from discarded fishing tackle, 10 years after the introduction of a law to protect them, a conservation group has warned. Some 720 had to be treated for injury and poisoning through tackle left by careless anglers in just nine months of last year, according to a report by the National Convention for the Welfare of Swans and Wildlife.

The casualty figures were the worst since the sale of lead shot was banned in 1987, said the convention, whose volunteers work from 30 swan rescue centres throughout Britain.



NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING

Recycled paper made up 41.2% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1996



bribery
STAINS
face discrimination
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orship declining fast



The writer and his victims: Home truths for six leading lights in politics, literature and the arts

That nice Alan Bennett takes the gloves off for Tory politicians, the Queen Mother – and Dennis Potter

Ian Burrell
and Jojo Moyes

Alan Bennett, in his original diaries, said that he wanted to be "liked and thought a nice man".

New extracts from the revised edition, however, will do nothing to endear him to many prominent figures in the worlds of politics, literature and entertainment.

He jokes at the expense of the Queen Mother, professing a desire to kick Michael Heseltine in the backside and describes the writer AN Wilson as "a silly prat".

A revised version of his successful diary, *Writing Home*, is to be published by Faber next month.

Most of the playwright's vitriol is reserved for Conservative

politicians, with Baroness Thatcher and her "cronies" standing accused of having "uncivilised debate and denatured the nation".

Lord Tebbit is dismissed as a "sneer on legs, snarling and heaping contempt on any vaguely liberal view", while the Conservative MPs Tony Marlow and Edward Leigh are described as "fat and complacent and looking like two cheeks of the same ass".

The backside of the Michael Heseltine is also a prime target for Bennett's boot. Or in the words of the playwright's father, he would like to "kick Fitton" to Mr Heseltine and Cedric Brown, the chairman of British Gas.

But Bennett does not restrict his line of fire to the Houses of Parliament. The man once described as "the kind of writer that mothers like" is quite prepared to snipe at his peers.

AN Wilson aroused Bennett's ire with an article in the

while an air-raid warden during the Second World War.

Joe Fitton, a fellow warden who was not normally known for bad language, lost his temper one night and said he would like to give the source of his anger "a right kick up the arse".

The expression "to Joe Fitton" was adopted by the Bennett family, and the playwright reveals his wish to do some "Joe Fittoning" to Mr Heseltine and Cedric Brown, the chairman of British Gas.

But Bennett does not restrict his line of fire to the Houses of Parliament. The man once described as "the kind of writer that mothers like" is quite prepared to snipe at his peers.

AN Wilson aroused Bennett's ire with an article in the

London *Evening Standard* which compared the Yorkshire-born playwright to Liberace and Cliff Richard.

Bennett has back at the perceived slur by recording his response in a new extract to the diaries: "You silly prat is what I feel, wondering how anyone who writes for such a rag as the *Standard* feels in a position to say anything about anybody."

Another writer, Lord Archer, is disparagingly compared to the comedian Bernard Manning.

Peter Cook, the late satirist, is affectionately mocked for his "deeply embarrassing" attempts to impersonate Elvis Presley and to quote passages of Shakespeare by heart.

Bennett also passes com-

ment on his late friend's vanity. "Slim and elegant in those days, [Cook] was also quite vain, sensing instinctively as soon as he came into a room where the mirror was and casting pensive sidelong glances at it, while stroking his chin, as if checking on his own beauty," he recalls.

The health of the late Dennis Potter, says Bennett, was always a factor in his fame. "He visibly conformed to what the public thinks artists ought to be – poor or promiscuous, suffering or starved."

In pages peppered with deft, witty humour Bennett displays his sympathies for the poor, the homeless and the gay community.

His description of the Commons debate on lowering the

age of consent for gay sex lauds the "civilised and courageous" words of Labour's Chris Smith in the face of bigoted opposition.

Bennett observes: "The frail faltering flame of heterosexuality always in danger of being snuffed out by the hot homosexual wind."

Establishment figures are de-

scribed with rather less reverence.

Bennett quotes a joke about the Queen Mother in an old people's home and not being treated with the proper respect.

The joke goes: "Queen Mother: Don't you know who I am? Nurse: No, dear, but if

you go over and ask the lady at the desk she'll probably be able to tell you."

Writing Home topped the best-seller list and has sold more than 750,000 copies. The

newspaper he responded with typical wit by rejecting a subsequent interview request, saying "winsome, lose some".

Bennett, now a millionaire and still unable to do wrong in the eyes of critics, has shown an increasing reluctance to hold his tongue when others anger or irritate him.

In his 1996 diaries, he made a caustic attack on Classic FM listeners who he dismisses as "Saga louts".

In an astonishing outburst he writes: "I loathe the Classic FM more and more for its costliness, its safety and its wholehearted endorsement of the post-Thatcher world, with medical insurance and Saga holidays rammed down your throat between every item."

Bennett was described as "winsome" in an article in this

newspaper he responded with typical wit by rejecting a subsequent interview request, saying "winsome, lose some".

And despite the potshots at others in the new extracts, Bennett is not short on self-deprecation.

He recalls how his pride got the better of him while he sat in a car in Yorkshire waiting to acknowledge a fan, waving towards him with a smile on her face.

To Bennett's surprise, the woman actually climbed into the seat beside him before exclaiming: "Only in Yorkshire ... bloody hell! I'm in the wrong car!" and rushed off to her waving husband.

Bennett writes: "The person who is really shown up by the story is, of course, me."

First cloned lamb paves way for life by production line

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

British scientists confirmed yesterday that they have cloned an adult sheep from a single cell, to produce a lamb with the same original genes as its "mother".

But important questions remain about the viability of animals produced by this method, and about the possibility that they may be more prone to cancers and that flocks of them might have lowered resistance to natural diseases.

The breakthrough, the first time such cloning has been achieved in the world, was the work of scientists at the Roslin Institute near Edinburgh and biotechnology company PPL Therapeutics, and builds on work done there last year.

The first of the cloned sheep, Dolly, was born a few weeks ago – but comes from an animal which is six years old. That means that its genes have already been damaged by cosmic rays and environmental toxins, meaning they could develop

cancers abnormally early. Also, a genetic "fuse" on the chromosomes, called the telomeres – which burns down one by one step every time the cell divides – will have shortened so radically that the animal could die abruptly. Sheep on farms normally have a lifespan of less than 10 years.

Dr Ian Wilmut, who led the research team at the institute, said last night that there was no data yet about the effects of genetic damage and telomere shortening.

The immediate application of cloning will be to study ageing, cancer and genetics, and to produce medicines. But it opens up the possibility of a bizarre world in which people can be copied and animals are "made" on a production line – as described in Aldous Huxley's novel, *Brave New World*.

The scientists started with cells taken from an adult animal and slowed down the division of the chromosomes in the nucleus. They then took unfertilised egg cells, removed their nucle-

us – which contains the genetic material of the egg's mother – and inserted the nuclei of the original adult cells. The cloned cell was implanted in a ewe, and produced a total of eight lambs. Both male and female sheep can be produced by the process.

In theory, the same principle could be used with human cells and eggs. However, it would be illegal to clone a human under the present law, and attempts to clone animals can only be performed under licence from the Home Office.

Dr Wilmut said: "The idea of cloning humans is just fanciful. All of us would find it completely unacceptable to work with human embryos. It's important that inappropriate use of this technology is prohibited."

"We shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Britain should be celebrating this advance which offers commercial opportunities for companies here and potential healthcare products for British patients."

Scientists concerned with ethical issues said yesterday

that it may be necessary to introduce laws against the cloning of animals for "production purposes". Dr Donald Bruce, a research chemist who chairs a committee on Science, Religion and Technology for the Church of Scotland, said: "I don't have any objections to the genetic modification, to the experiment ... But to turn them out like a production line of widgets seems to lose something of the individual dignity of the animal, to lose respect for it."

Last year, scientists at the institute produced cloned sheep by implanting cells taken from an embryo into an egg cell. That produced mixed results, with unusually large animals and a number of deaths at birth. The new technique appears to be more efficient. Only one of the clones died at birth, and that showed no signs of infection or abnormality.

PPL Therapeutics, which has bred genetically engineered sheep able to produce human proteins in their milk, said it was "a major scientific advance".

Species, which also sponsored the research, are to undertake a consultation process with the Game Conservancy Trust and other interested parties about the likely effect of returning pine martens to England.

The small nocturnal creatures were killed off by hunters for their expensive fur coats, or by game-keepers who saw them as a threat to gamebirds.

A two-year study, funded by English Nature, has identified four sites in England where the biological conditions are suitable for colonies of pine martens to be re-established.

Reintroduction could be controversial because of the potential threat of a new carnivore to the conservation of rare birds and to game-rearing.

The leader of the research team, Dr Paul Bright, an ecology lecturer at Royal Holloway, University of London, stressed that no re-introduction would take place until a final assessment had been made of the pine martens' likely impact on other animals.

English Nature and the People's Trust for Endangered

Comeback plans for 'extinct' tree weasel

Ian Burrell

Ecologists are preparing the way for the first reintroduction of a carnivore into England. The pine marten, also known as the tree weasel, is believed to have died out in England and Wales where it was common less than 200 years ago.

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English Nature and the People's Trust for Endangered

the availability of food in the form of voles and rabbits – are even better in some sites than in Galloway.

The location which has most impressed the English Nature team is at Kielder, in Northumberland, where there is a large coniferous forest close to the North Tyne.

Kielder is also regarded as a safe location for the animals because of the low risk of them meeting a violent death from roads or animal traps.

The other three English sites which are under consideration are the Forest of Dean, the woodlands to the south and east of Dartmoor and in the Weald at Heathfield, East Sussex.

If the pine marten were to be resettled it would be the first time a carnivore which had ceased to exist in England had been reintroduced.

The nearest comparable exercise was the reintroduction of otters in East Anglia, although they continued to survive in other parts of England.

Pine martens (*Martes martes*) are close cousins of otters, badgers and polecats. They spend most of the day in their lairs in hollow trees, rock fissures or disused birds' nests.

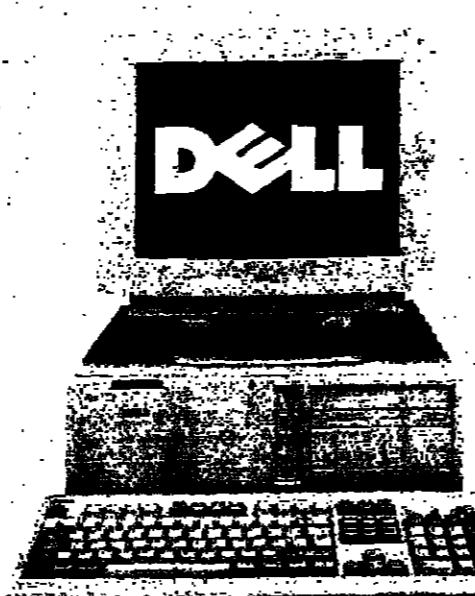


Hello Dolly: Cloned from six-year-old sheep. Photograph: PA

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news

Labour pledges £20m US-style literacy drive

Judith Judd

Education Editor

Literacy programmes in America, New Zealand and Australia will provide the blueprint for Labour's ambitious plans to retrain all primary teachers to teach reading in its drive against illiteracy to be announced this week.

Writing in today's *Independent*, Professor Michael Barber, head of the party's literary taskforce, makes clear that teachers will be retrained to use prescribed reading methods including phonics (matching sounds and letters) and whole class teaching. The programme will involve more detailed control of how teachers teach than has ever been attempted before.

Labour will also make an hour a day on literacy compulsory for all primary schools when the national curriculum is revised in 2000.

Labour's plans are the latest in the pre-election battle over education. The Prime Minister disclosed the Conservatives' latest proposals on Saturday when he said that marks out of a hundred in national tests will be published for all pupils instead of the present grades which cover a wide range of marks.

Professor Barber describes how a systematic approach to teaching reading pioneered by Bob Slavin at John Hopkins University, Baltimore, has raised standards in 475 schools in the US. A similar approach has also succeeded in Victoria, Australia. In both programmes, teachers aim to surround children with large numbers of books and the pace of teaching is quick.

Labour's national literacy targets will include bringing 80 per cent of 11-year-olds up to the expected standard in national English tests by 2001. At present 43% fail to reach the target. The party wants all children to reach it by the end of two Labour governments. Labour has costed literacy changes at £20m a year which would be redirected from other parts of the education budget.

Questioned on BBC 1's *The Frost Programme* yesterday, David Blunkett, Labour's education spokesman, said: "It is getting it right from the beginning, using the right methods, setting aside an hour a day and having targets that make it possible for us to lift our horizons."

The Government's national literacy project has already introduced a "literacy hour" as well as a bigger emphasis on phonics and grammar in a small number of pilot schools but Labour's plans go much further.

A spokesman for the Association of Teachers and Lecturers said: "Primary teachers are already concentrating intensely on literacy. They will be upset to hear yet another criticism of what they're trying to do. They are not opposed to new ideas provided they are consulted about them."

Gillian Shepherd, Secretary of State for Education, angered teachers by saying that the Prime Minister's remarks meant that tests for seven-, 11- and 14-year-olds would be simplified again despite repeated revisions over the last seven years.

"We are not just talking about simplifying scores but about simplifying tests," he said. "We would then be able to give parents a mark for their children that they would easily understand." Pupils' marks in national tests are already available to parents on request.

Government advisers are also piloting a scheme where parents of seven-year-olds are told how their child has performed in reading in relation to their age.

£20m cost of illiteracy, page 15

Fairground attractions may be kept under wraps



Terry Turbin, acting curator of the Fairground Museum collection, with two of the exhibits from the collection - which was due to be opened to the public in a purpose-built museum at Northampton - whose future is in jeopardy after a failed bid for lottery cash, writes Stephen Goodwin.

While major museums and galleries were lapping up a £137m pay-out last week, the founders of the Fairground Heritage Trust were contemplating the end of a dream and the break-up of a priceless

collection of richly decorated roundabouts and shows. If the Trust cannot raise £225,000 by the end of April, its 10-year drive for a National Fairground Museum will be over.

Photograph: Keith Dobney



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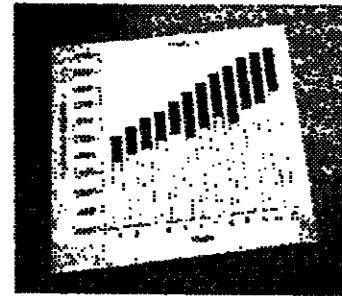
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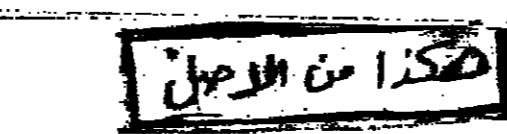
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Heath condemned as a socialist by Tory Euro-sceptics

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Sir Edward Heath, the former Conservative prime minister, yesterday was urged to join New Labour by furious Tory Euro-sceptic MPs yesterday after endorsing Tony Blair's programme for the social chapter, the minimum wage, and a Scottish parliament.

The remarks by Sir Edward, 80, who is standing for the Tories in Old Bedf ord and Sidcup at the general election, threatened to undermine a central theme of the election attack by Brian Mawhinney, the Tory party chairman, that Labour would import the policies that had increased unemployment in Germany and France. John Prescott, Labour's deputy leader, said Sir Edward had "demolished his own party's negative election campaign".

Sir Edward rejected John Major's claims that the social chapter could cost 500,000 jobs and said the purpose of the minimum wage was to avoid sweat labour "quite rightly so". On the Scottish parliament, he said:

"There is no danger to the Union of the United Kingdom, none whatsoever."

The former Tory leader also criticised Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind's controversial tour of EU member states. "I wish that the Foreign Secretary hadn't gone on a tour of European countries, trying, as he said



Sir Edward Heath: 'Completely at odds with Conservative Party'

openly, to appeal to their people above the heads of their governments and politicians.

"What would we say if somebody came to this country and said we will ignore your politicians, your government and just listen to what I have got to say? It would not go down very well."

His remarks provoked a backlash from Tory Euro-sceptics. John Carlisle, MP for Luton North, said of Sir Edward: "He is probably the best example of New Labour that there is and the best reason why people should ignore what he has got to say."

As an unashamed socialist, he is causing enormous damage to himself personally, and partly to his party. The sooner he goes, the better."

Another leading Euro-scep-

tic, Bill Cash, said: "Sir Edward Heath is completely at odds with the Conservative Party on its most important policies, which totally contradicts his assertion that it is we, the Euro-realists, who are in the wrong."

Teresa Gorman, MP for Bletchley, who lost the whip over her Euro-sceptic rebellions, said the Chief Whip should discipline the former prime minister. "I was carpeted for introducing a Referendum Bill, so he should be carpeted, too, for what he has said," she said.

"It is people like Sir Edward, with his bitter and twisted spite, who could cost the Tories the election, not me."

"When is Sir Edward going to join the Labour Party and have done with it?"

"He has never really been a Conservative at all. His views have always been socialist, in so far as he has political views. Now that he is reaching his dotage, it is all coming out."

"How can he stand as a Conservative at this election when he is putting forward straight Labour policies?"

A senior Tory party source said: "One wonders what government policy he does support these days." And the former Treasury minister David Heathcoat-Amory said: "I detect a note of desperation... because he has lost the argument about so many of his beliefs. He is beginning to lash out against the majority of the party."

NHS placemen face axe under Smith

Labour's health spokesman, Chris Smith, hinted strongly yesterday that he would end the practice of political appointments to NHS trust boards by advertising for candidates.

The Secretary of State for Health currently decides who chairs such quangos. But Mr Smith said he was "looking seriously" at such posts being advertised.

Labour has tried to ease fears that it would sweep away some Tory sympathisers on trust boards and replace them with its own placemen.

"Yesterday, speaking on LWT's *Jonathan Dimbleby* programme, Mr Smith said: "We do need seriously to look at the appointments to the boards of these trusts because at the moment they are not particularly representative of the communities that they serve."

"Many of the early appointments particularly that were made to the trust boards were made on partisan grounds by Conservative ministers."

Mr Smith also reaffirmed his plans to oblige GPs to join together in "locality groups", which would jointly commission services and run their budgets collectively.

The scheme would be up and running within three years of Labour taking power and is aimed at ending what Labour sees as a two-tier service, with GP fundholders' patients enjoying some advantages over non-fundholding GPs' patients.

"What's happened is the moment, with some GPs becoming fundholders and other GPs not becoming fundholders, that we have the same patients with the same conditions, living in the same area, being treated in different ways. There is a two-tier health service being created by this," he said.

However, Mr Smith insisted that if GP fundholders' group wanted to remain running their own budgets, they could do so, but only if a majority of the other practices in the local area agreed.

Mr Smith said that although some of his proposals would not require changes in the law, he hoped those that did could be legislated for in Mr Blair's first Queen's Speech.

The shadow Health secretary was sanguine about the fact that in the first year of a Labour government he would not get more money for health spending than the figure which has already been spelled out by the Conservative Chancellor Kenneth Clarke for 1997-98.

He said: "I have to operate within the departmental budget for the whole of the first year and I have to be able to demonstrate that what we're doing is spending that money well and wisely and cutting down on waste - only then could I even dream of going to Cabinet and arguing for more resources."

However, Mr Smith predicted that by tackling unemployment, funds could be freed up for spending in areas such as health in a Labour government's second year.

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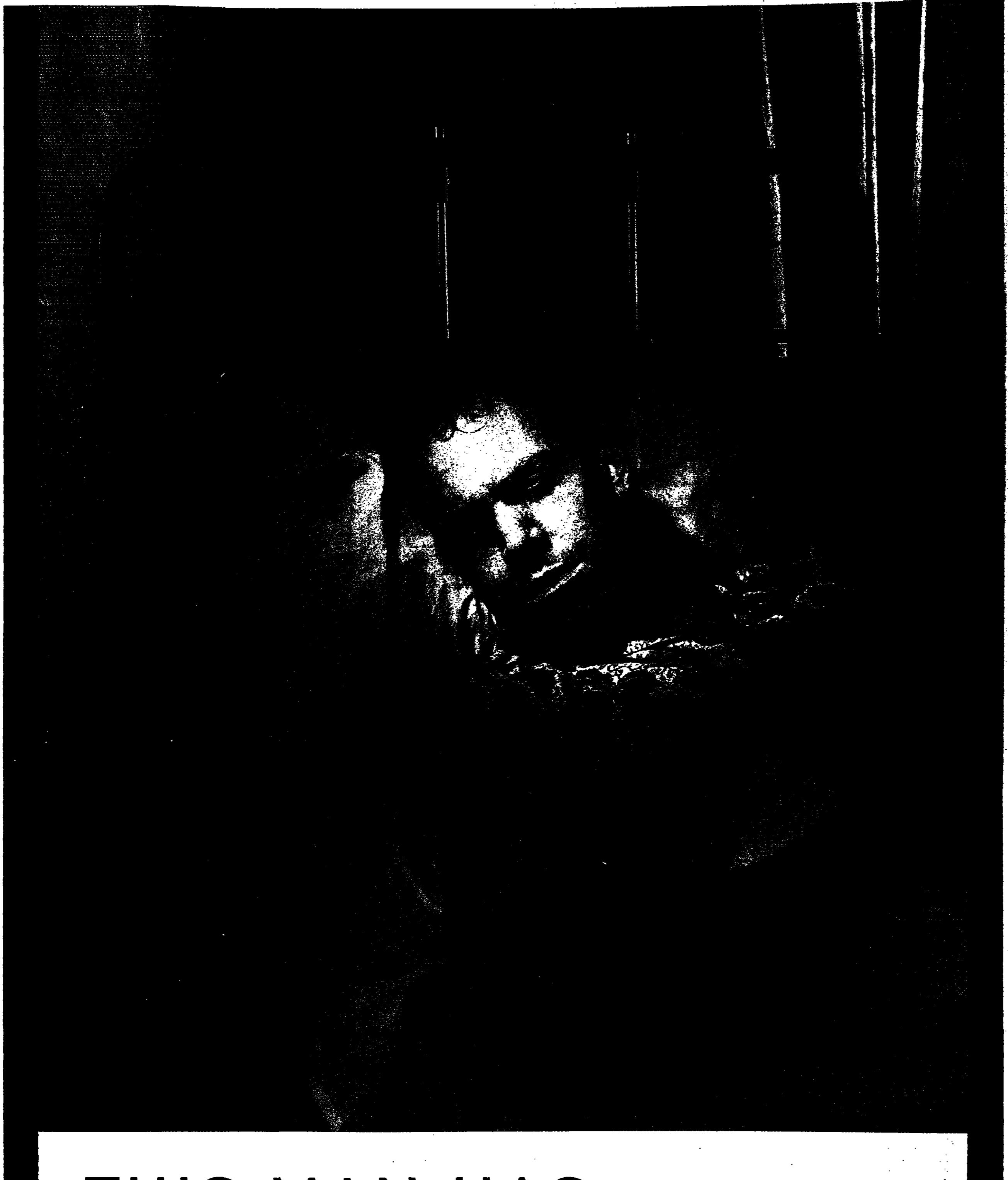
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Gun lobby takes protest to the streets of London



Banner-waving gun enthusiasts wading through central London yesterday to protest against anti-gun laws planned in the wake of the Dunblane tragedy. The demonstration, organised by Spealer's Corner and the Sportsman's Association, attracted more than

12,000 hunting and shooting fans from around the United Kingdom. As well as showing opposition to the Firearms Bill, by marching from Speaker's Corner to Trafalgar Square, they spoke of possibly fielding candidates in the general election.

Their spokesman, Michael Yardley, said the rally – the third since the association was founded last October – had drawn an "extraordinary" number of people, who refused "to go down quietly".

Photograph: Emma Boam

Professors take facts of cancer to schools

Ian Burrow

Schoolchildren as young as nine are to be given lessons about lung cancer to dissuade them from taking up smoking.

Scientists will begin going into classrooms next month to give young children information about the disease.

The scientists, from the Cancer Research Campaign, will shortly meet with officials from the Department for Education to discuss the extension of the schools programme to the rest of the country next year.

The classes are being aimed at 9- and 10-year-olds because educationalists have advised that many older children will have already started experimenting with cigarettes.

The Cancer Research Campaign will shortly meet with officials from the Department for Education to discuss the extension of the schools programme to the rest of the country next year.

The programme also educates children on the dangers of skin cancer from over-exposure to the sun and informs older schoolgirls of the importance of screening for cervical cancer.

Jean King, the CRC's head of education, said many teachers still found it awkward to talk to children about cancer.

She said: "It's still a bit of a taboo subject in schools even though one in three of us will get it at some point in our lives. Teachers are uncomfortable in case somebody's granny has died from the disease."

She added: "Children are given advice on how to avoid peer pressure to smoke and to realise that most lumps on the body are not cancers, but that it is important to have them seen by a doctor."

Professor Charlton said other lessons taught children important social skills in coping with cancer, including helping friends who became ill with the disease.

She said: "When a child who has had cancer comes back to school he or she can be ostracised because friends think the cancer is infectious or that the person caught the disease for doing things they should not have done."

Each year, 1,500 new cases of cancer are reported in children under the age of 15 in Britain. After heart disease, cancer remains Britain's biggest killer among adults.

Schoolchildren in Manchester, Cardiff, Glasgow, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol and Cambridge will be the first to receive the new classes.

The programme aims to be

non-dictatorial, providing the young children with the facts and leaving them to make their own decisions.

Children are also given advice on how to avoid peer pressure to smoke and to realise that most lumps on the body are not cancers, but that it is important to have them seen by a doctor.

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Family of five killed in flat fire

Thomas Harding

A couple who died with their three young children in a blaze in their flat yesterday made desperate efforts to save the children's lives before they were overcome by smoke.

Shaguan and Rukshana Miah struggled through choking fumes in their second-floor flat as they tried to save their children, including a two-month-old baby girl. But they were overcome by the smoke fumes and heat and died.

Firefighters found the body of Mr Miah, 41, in the hallway when they burst into the flat in Palmers Green, north London. Mrs Miah, 25, had managed to pick up her baby, Mary – who was born on Christmas Day – but both were found lying on the bedroom floor. The couple's eldest daughter, Mishkatath, 4, and their 17-month-old son, Shamir, were still in their bed.

The fire began shortly before 7am yesterday in their home above the Dipioli Indian restaurant where Mr Miah was a partner. Two tenants in the first-floor flat raised the alarm before smoke forced them to leave the building.

A Fire Brigade spokesman said: "This is a terrible tragedy – it was shocking to find a family like this. A large part of the flat was destroyed. It was extremely arduous because of the smoke, fire and heat."

Tory stands up for disgruntled rank and file

Michael Streeter

Disillusioned Conservatives unite; you now have your own party, and parliamentary candidate, to represent you.

The Disillusioned Conservatives (Campaign for Change), who prefer to see themselves as a "group" rather than a party, have just published their first survey of well-disillusioned Tories.

It reveals that at least 5 per cent of voters describe themselves as "DC", and are prepared to sign a statement to that effect. Their main areas of unhappiness are the party's confusions over the European Union and the single currency, law and order, the performance of ministers – including John Major – and the Tories' electoral campaigning tactics.

Now, for the first time, these disgruntled Tories have some one to vote for other than a Labour or Liberal Democrat candidate to register their protest. Phil Gott, a chartered accountant and a former constituency party chairman, is standing at the Wirral South by-election on Thursday as a Disillusioned candidate.

Mr Gott, from Milton Keynes, said yesterday: "I am a Conservative through and through and our supporters want the party to win the general election."

"But they have to start to do things differently – we do not

want five more years of the same thing."

This "same thing", as defined by the DCs, is a failure to tackle law and order properly, a lack of serious debate over the single currency and Europe, and the constant negative campaigning.

Mr Gott, 38, who has no connection with Wirral but believes he could pick up 2,500 votes, said that the Conservative Party is "dying on its feet".

He added: "The average age of a member is 63. The party needs to modernise itself and listen to people. It needs to move forward."

The group's survey of 500 people in Leighton Buzzard produced 23 who were prepared to sign up as "disillusioned" Tories. These people would only vote Conservative again if the party showed a willingness to change.

In Wirral South, where the

Tories are defending a 8,000-plus majority, Mr Gott, who helped set up DC 18 months ago, says he has found fertile ground for his ideas. "The level of support is astounding. I needed 10 electors to nominate me. Having knocked on just 22 doors I had my 10 signatures."

The DCs have not yet decided their tactics in a general election. "We will see what response we get from the electorate in Wirral South and from the Conservative Party. It's a question of wait and see."

MI5 defies the hackers to open its Internet site

Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

MI5 is to join the electronic superhighway to help recruit spies and provide information about the security service.

The secret service agency is putting in elaborate security measures to stop computer hackers breaking into its new web site and using it to spread false information.

MI5's move into the Internet, which is due to take place by the summer, is part of the service's attempt to promote its policy of greater openness.

Although at first, the site is not expected to be open to inquiries from the public, a postal address will be published. Later, the agency will consider opening an e-mail address for people around the world to make contact. This could be a useful source of intelligence and anonymous tip-offs.

There will also be details about recruitment into the service. Other information expected to be electronically published includes details of MI5's work such as targeting the IRA and Russian spies, its budget, manpower, aims and history.

In the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has used the Internet to help in its inquiries. Last year, it received thousands of responses after it publicised its e-mail address and asking for help in solving the mysterious crash of TWA flight 800 in which 230 people died.

MI5 is highly unlikely to make such direct appeals, but important details could be sent anonymously about things such as IRA activities, by informers or citizens who are too frightened to be identified. The police and security services have had a series of successes during the past year on the strength of tips from the public.

But before the web site is launched security chiefs want to ensure the system is tamper-proof. Computer experts are currently working on a noticeboard that cannot be hacked into and altered.

The ease with which some

hackers have been able to break into sites was demonstrated to devastating and embarrassing effect in December when the Labour Party's world-wide web site was attacked. An American computer "geek" broke into the site and changed the title "Road to the Manifesto" to "Road to Nowhere". He also tinkered with links to other web sites so

they read: "The Labour Party sex shop," and transferred visitors to pages carrying pornography. Later Mr Blair's *Spitting Image* effigy was added under the banner "Hacked Labour: Same Politicians, Same Lies."

On a more serious note, hackers on the Internet broke into US Defense Department computers more than 160,000 times in 1995. Investigators from the Congress discovered.

Some Pinochet supporters at the University of Texas have also been accused of publishing a terrorist "crib sheet" on the Internet giving detailed information about alleged MI5 installations and military bases in Northern Ireland.

The very nature of the Internet – an open system without a governing body – encourages hacking. However, a number of software security packages called "firewalls" and other techniques for keeping out unwanted visitors have been developed.

During the past few years, MI5 has raised its public profile by advertising for potential recruits and publishing an annual report, which gives a wide range of details about the service. Other security agencies such as MI6 have yet to decide whether to follow suit.

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news

Blair plans European affairs department

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

The Labour Party is considering creating a special government department to deal with Europe in an effort to show that, in government, it will be strong in its negotiations with its European partners.

The main purpose of the department would be to liaise and

negotiate with Brussels, ensuring that Britain has a much better relationship with the European Union than the present government. The minister in charge would be expected to play a major role in all Britain's dealings with Europe.

The Foreign Office which is responsible currently for dealing with the EU has frequently been criticised for failing to

alert ministers to what is happening in Brussels and for its poor negotiation skills. A new set-up, with many new civil servants, would also help remove the resentment felt in Brussels about the British attitude towards the EU.

The plan for a department of European affairs is currently being worked on in Tony Blair's office by his chief-of-

staff, Jonathan Powell. While there is a strong logic to the plan, it is bound to be controversial because it will split the Foreign Office and make the job of Foreign Secretary, earmarked for Robin Cook, the main standard-bearer for the Left, much less important than in the current set-up. A senior Labour source said: "They are thinking about it, but they might

well be wise to leave well alone. Robin, who has been doing all the preparatory work on the Inter-Governmental Conference [due to start at the end of May] would be furious if the role is taken away from him." Without Europe and with the Cold War now ended, the job of Foreign Secretary would be little more than a "glorified standard-bearer", the source added.

Any radical shake-up would be resisted within Whitehall, especially if it involved the partial dismemberment of the prestigious Foreign Office. However, one civil service source said: "The FO really deserves to be shaken up. It has performed extremely badly on the Europe issue and does not know how to deal with Brussels which treats them with contempt."

The idea also has unfortunate associations with the ill-fated department of economic affairs which was created in 1964 as an attempt to develop economic policy away from the constraints of the treasury but never succeeded in posing a serious challenge and it was eventually scrapped.

However, the advantage for Mr Blair is that it would create an extra key Cabinet post with no present shadow incumbent and therefore it could be offered to his loyal campaign manager and strategist, Peter Mandelson, the MP for Hartlepool.

Another possible candidate is George Robertson, the current shadow Scottish secretary, who is thought to have done the Europe job well before taking up his current post.

Nature quango denies paying off laird

Stephen Goodwin
Heritage Correspondent

A Highland laird whose family estate will receive £129,000 from the taxpayer for not clearing precious woodlands is to leave the board of the Government's nature adviser, Scottish Natural Heritage, which agreed the payment.

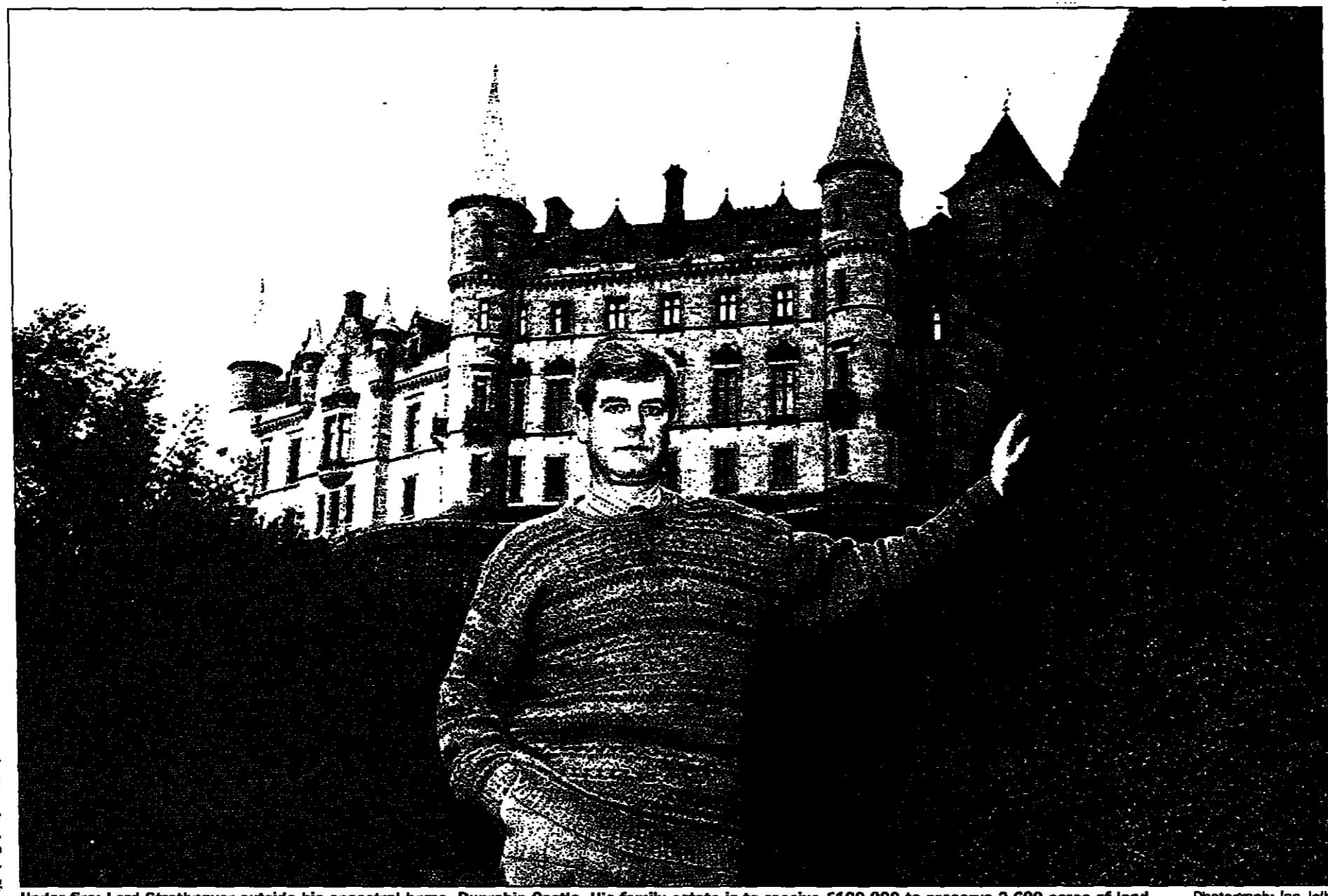
Lord Strathnaver risks gaining the notoriety of his ancestor, the first Duke of Sutherland, an architect of the Highland Clearances, over the compensation deal with SNH.

The trustees of the Sutherland Estates will receive a one-off payment of £129,000 for a 100-year management agreement covering 2,600 acres of forest, heath, saltmarsh and sand dunes by Loch Fleet in the far north-west of Scotland.

The crucial part of the agreement covers 100 acres of Balblair Woods which contains the only genetically viable colony of one-flowered wintergreen and other rare plants and lichen.

Magnus Magnusson, the quizzmaster chairman of SNH, said the board had nothing to be ashamed of: "Lord Strathnaver is not in any way holding the nation to ransom."

The payment represents the difference between the amount the estate could realise by cutting the timber in a commercial operation and managing it for nature conservation. Some of



Under fire: Lord Strathnaver outside his ancestral home, Dunrobin Castle. His family estate is to receive £129,000 to preserve 2,600 acres of land

Photograph: Ian Joly

the Scots pines will still be felled and the revenue shared between SNH and the estate.

Labour MPs with an interest in land reform condemned the

arrangement. The frontbencher Brian Wilson said legislation permitting payments to landowners for not carrying out threatened damage was "bizarre

and ripe for review." Calum MacDonald, MP for the Western Isles, wrote earlier this month to SNH calling for Lord Strathnaver's resignation.

It was untenable for somebody sitting on the SNH board, and presumably describing himself as a conservationist, to be applying for compensation."

"The politics of all this has overtaken the facts," said an SNH spokesman. "We are not paying money just to stop trees being cut down. There is the bonus of a 2,600-acre nature reserve – open to the public – which is going to be a spectacular place for scientists and naturalists."

Editor calls for elected head of state

A Church of Scotland publication will call today for the monarchy to be replaced by an elected head of state.

But the call by Dr Robin Hill, editor of the kirk magazine, *Life and Work*, is unlikely to stir great passions within the church, its chief spokesman on constitutional affairs said yesterday.

"I would not say it is a subject which is taboo, but nor would it be seen as something which stirs great passions on either side for the most part," said Dr Alison Elliot, convener of the kirk's Church and Nation committee, which deals with public affairs.

She said the Church of Scotland, the mainstream church north of the border with 700,000 members, has a different relationship with the monarchy than the Church of England.

Members of the kirk, which regards Jesus Christ as its head, owe no more than normal duties to the monarch and the Queen holds no privileged position within the church structure.

The call for the monarch's replacement is contained in the latest issue of *Life and Work*, the official magazine of the church but which is editorially independent. The editor, in a personal view, writes: "A modern country which continues to appoint a head of state by means of the lottery of inheritance runs a very real risk of getting what it deserves – a leader who is neither respected nor wanted but who must be tolerated [endured] nevertheless, possibly for several decades."

He praises the Queen as the "world's finest head of state", but criticises the monarchy for "failed marriages, expensive royal yachts, and outdated traditions". And citizens should have the "dignity" of choosing their own head of state – either an elected president, or a ruler from within the ranks of the Royal Family.

His call is balanced in the magazine by a defence of the monarchy from the Rev Charles Robertson, who argues that the monarchy works at least as well as any other system and has a "sacramental" quality.

The Church of Scotland's main concern with constitutional matters over the past 50 years have centred on the way Scotland is governed.

Last year one member of its ruling general assembly objected to the use of the term "loyal subjects" in a formal letter to the Queen.

Dr Elliot said yesterday: "In Scotland we are used to questioning the constitutional framework that we are in. While for a lot of people that has been concerned with the government of Scotland itself, increasingly we are looking at the government of the UK as a whole."

"So the wider question of the constitution, a Bill of Rights and other matters, is becoming more of an issue in Scotland."

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Absentee rate among MPs on the increase

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

On the eve of a general election in which MPs will be seeking to persuade the voters that they are worth every penny of their £43,000 backbench pay, the Commons has published work records showing that absentee rates are rising.

While the Chamber of the House is the main forum for Commons debate, the detailed examination of legislation is supposed to be carried out in standing committees – mostly meeting away from the public gaze.

Commons records show that in the one-year session ending last October, 60 Bills were enacted, and 39 of them were considered in 201 sittings of standing committees, on which 536 of Westminster's 647 politically-active Members were asked to serve.

Attendance records show that in that session, 1995-96, the absentee rate was 23.5 per cent; up from 17.5 per cent in 1992-93, the first session after the last election. In 1994-95, the absentee rate was 21.5 per cent.

Those figures disguise a variety of performances by individual Members. Some refuse to serve at all on standing committees; others allow their names to be put forward, and do not attend; others are most assiduous, logging record at-

tendance on standing committees, and on the complementary select committees that monitor the work of Whitehall departments.

Commons workhorses for 1995-96 include:

■ Matthew Banks (C Southport), who attended 57 out of 62 standing committee meetings

■ John Whittingdale (C Colchester S and Maldon), who went to 50 out of 52 standing committee sittings, and 28 out of 40 sessions of the Health Select Committee.

Colchester appears to be a well-served city. Mr Whittingdale also went to three out of four sessions of the extremely mundane Committee on Consolidation of Legislation – which managed an absentee rate of almost 70 per cent in 1995-96.

Other high rates of absenteeism were registered for the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, which vets delegated legislation – 55.7 per cent – and European legislation – 55.7 per cent – of the most important committees at Westminster, which had an absentee rate of 43 per cent, up from 38 per cent the year before. For the year as a whole, the Commons sat for just 146 days – 13 days less than the previous year. The average length of a day's sitting was 8 hours 45 minutes.

■ Bernard Jenkin (C Colchester N), who went to 61 out of 65 standing committee sittings to which he was called, and 28 out of 35 Social Security Select Committee hearings;

■ Stephen Timms (Lab Newham NE), who managed only 52 out of 70 standing committee sessions, but 38 meetings

he had been summoned to attend, along with 26 out of 32 Transport Select Committee sittings.

■ John Whittingdale (C Colchester S and Maldon), who went to 50 out of 52 standing committee meetings, and 28 out of 40 sessions of the Health Select Committee.

John Whittingdale: Notching up a good attendance record

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John Whittingdale: Notching up a

international

French élite march for immigrants

John Lichfield
Paris

The figures tell the story. More than 100,000 people (not 50,000 as the police begrudgingly insisted) marched through Paris at the weekend to protest against a proposed new law to control illegal immigration.

Similar demonstrations in the provinces, however, attracted only small crowds: 2,000 in Toulouse, 1,000 in Strasbourg, 300 in Marseilles. The revolt against the new law – and by proxy, the far right – has been led by prominent intellectuals and artists and seems to be disportionately a Parisian affair.

According to the polls, more than 60 per cent of French people support the new immigration Bill, which is due to be finalised in the National Assembly tomorrow. Paradoxically, the same polls suggest that just over 50 per cent of French people support the scores of petitions of protest against the Bill, which led to Saturday's march.

The arithmetic is not necessarily as strange as it sounds: it has been clear from the beginning that the real target of the protest is Jean-Marie Le Pen's xenophobic Front National, following its electoral victory in Vitrolles, near Marseilles. This was evident from the banners and placards on Saturday, divided more or less equally between attacks on Jean-Louis Debré, the interior minister who drafted the proposed law, and attacks on the FN.

The march began at the Gare de l'Est, as a deliberate reference to Jews deported from that station during the Second World War. In an atmosphere of solemn carnival the parade filled the whole of the Boulevard de Magenta – at least one mile long – by the time the last marchers left the station square.

The protesters were mostly under 50; mostly, but not all, smartly dressed; mostly, but not all, white; mostly, but not all, lefthand in their politics. Although some of the most fa-

mous petitioners (Catherine Deneuve; Isabelle Huppert) were nowhere to be seen, the marchers did include the cinema director Bertrand Tavernier, the wife of the late president, Danielle Mitterrand, the former Socialist prime minister, Laurent Fabius, and the Communist Party leader, Robert Hue.

"Nous sommes tous, tous des immigrés" (We are all immigrants), the marchers chanted. According to a recent demographical survey, this is not a huge exaggeration. Something like 20 per cent of the French population is descended from immigrants who have arrived in the last 70 years. "What of Joyce, Wilde, Hemingway?" asked one placard, referring to famous – but certainly not illegal – literary immigrants to France.

The apparent confusion between legal and illegal immigration runs throughout the protest against the Debré law. The protest leaders argue that the centre-right government of Alain Juppé – and the whole of French politics – have become infected by Le Pen's ideas. They have seized on the law, months after it was first promulgated, as a way of fighting back against the FN.

But the law, though clumsily drafted, is mostly a tightening of procedures against illegal immigration which have existed for years. Its most controversial clause – requiring French people sheltering certain categories of foreigners to inform the authorities when they move on – has already been dropped. Though impressive and well-intentioned, the protests risk alienating a section of the working and lower middle class, already vulnerable to the FN assertion that the nation's élite cares more for foreigners than the French.

Police yesterday cleared 400 "sans papiers" or illegal immigrants from the Saint Jean-Baptiste church in Belleville in the 19th arrondissement of Paris. The immigrants, mostly ethnic Chinese, occupied the church on Saturday to protest against the Debré law.



Solemn carnival: Protesters against the illegal immigration law filling the mile-long Boulevard de Magenta in Paris on Saturday. Photograph: Jean-Christophe Kahn/Reuters

American millions stay in for 'Schindler's List'

David Usborne
New York

Sunday night on the settee was a more harrowing experience than usual yesterday for the millions of Americans who tuned to the NBC network. Instead of the usual sitcoms, they found Liam Neeson playing Oskar Schindler in Steven Spielberg's epic, *'Schindler's List'*.

Nor did NBC give viewers many chances to escape the film's anguish. In an unprecedented move, the two-and-a-half-hour, black-and-white depiction of the Holocaust and the true story of Schindler's quest to save 1,100 Jews was shown without commercial breaks.

The project was an unusual collaboration between the network and the Ford Motor Company. Ford sponsored the entire presentation, but ran only two advertisements for its cars: one

at each end of the film. It was also allowed to include its badge on a time-clock which appeared occasionally during the film, silently counting down the seconds of brief breaks during which viewers could make their usual urgent domestic visits.

If the audience forecasts are born out, more people will have watched the film in the United States last night than during its entire run in US cinemas after its release in 1994. Then, some 25 million paid to see the film. Last night's audience was expected to top 30 million.

Mr Spielberg, who harvested seven Oscars for the work, was part of last night's presentation, suggesting which members of the family might be better off changing channel. "While every parent should make a judgement for their own family, I do not personally believe this is a film for the very young," he said.

United States military posts will go on alert today to monitor air activity around Cuba when 15 Cuban-American civilian aircraft fly towards Havana in a "protest and memorial flypast".

The light aircraft, including a Provost training jet still bearing the markings of the RAF, are commemorating the first anniversary of the shooting of two US civil aircraft by Cuban MiG fighters.

The shootings, in which four Americans of Cuban origin were killed, led to a dramatic hardening of policy towards Cuba by US President Bill Clinton and a subsequent rift between the US and the European Union over how to treat Fidel Castro's regime.

The officials said all US radar stations in the region would be on special alert, including the Norad system aimed at pro-

tecting the US from any nuclear missile attack.

The leader of Brothers to the Rescue, Jose Basulto, who narrowly escaped a chasing MiG fighter a year ago, said Florida-based US jet fighters could have and should have taken action to prevent the shootings.

The US State Department has called on the pilots and the Cuban government not to provoke a new incident today and Cuba has said it will "take all measures necessary to prevent a violation of our airspace".

After last year's shootouts, President Clinton abruptly changed tack and backed the Republican-sponsored Helms-Burton law tightening sanctions and discouraging foreign investment in Cuba. Mr Clinton urged the rest of the world to join a "chorus of democracy" against Mr Castro's communist regime.

That led to a year of conflict

with the European Union, which mostly believes doing business with Mr Castro is the best way to bring him into the democratic fold.

The dispute is now the focus of the World Trade Organisation, where the European Union has challenged the Helms-Burton law as restricting the principle of free trade. The US says that, because of Mr Castro's communist regime and its proximity to US shores, the law is an issue of US national security.

Mr Clinton's hardened stance last year was also seen as something of an election year coup which turned the votes of many Cuban-Americans, mostly Republican by tradition. Mr Clinton has twice offset EU concerns by suspending a key provision of the law which would allow US lawsuits against foreign companies doing business with Cuba in certain cases.

significant shorts

Nato tries to impress a reluctant Russia

Yevgeny Primakov, the Russian foreign minister, was last night holding talks in Brussels with Javier Solana, the Nato secretary-general, amid increasing concern about East-West disagreement on Nato enlargement.

The meeting took place following the visit to Moscow by Madeleine Albright, the US secretary of state, during which attempts to ease Russian fears about enlargement of the alliance, including the offer of a joint Russian-Nato brigade, appear to have failed. The Primakov-Solana talks were subject to a news blackout, but it was understood that Mr Solana intended to try to persuade Mr Primakov to back a deal on enlargement to ensure the plans could be finalised at the Nato summit to be held in Madrid in June.

In Moscow, President Boris Yeltsin renewed his attack on Nato expansion, but said he thought a compromise would be reached at a summit next month with President Bill Clinton.

Sarah Helm – Brussels

Two hundred die in Indian fire

About 200 people were feared killed and several injured when fire swept through shelters at a religious conference in eastern India, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. Some 5,000 people were attending the conference in Baripada town in Orissa state when the blaze tore through sheds erected for the three-day event.

Reuters – New Delhi

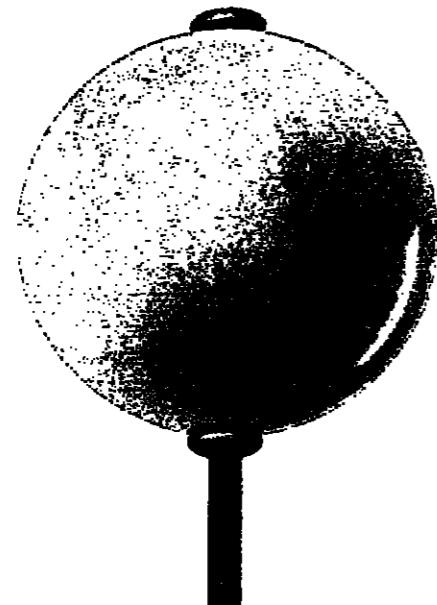
Atlanta fears serial bomber

Investigators are searching for links between a bomb blast at a lesbian nightclub in Atlanta, Georgia, at the weekend and two other unsolved bombings, including the Centennial Olympic Park bombing last July.

An FBI official speculated that there could be a serial bomber at work, as police went on the alert once again on Saturday night after an anonymous caller telephoned a bomb threat into the city firestation that had responded to the bomb attack at the club.

Reuters – Atlanta

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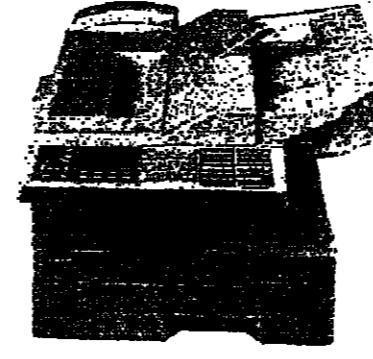
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Guns give way to games in West Bank divided city

Eric Silver
Hebron

Abu Shaban, a chubby, 40-year-old Palestinian in plain khaki uniform without insignia, learned his soldiering in Lebanon, where he fought the invading Israelis in 1982. He learned his Hebrew in an Israeli prison in his native Gaza, where he served three years for "illegal" activity in Yasser Arafat's Patah militia.

Along the way, Abu Shaban picked up a Be'er university law degree. He also plays a mean game of chess. His latest adversary is private Gilad Engel, a lanky, 18-year-old Israeli national serviceman who sports the knitted skullcap associated

"The first time I played chess on the Palestinian side I was surrounded by Arabs with Kalashnikovs'

with right-wing settlers. The score so far: Palestine 2, Israel 1. "It isn't easy to beat him," concedes Abu Shaban. "He's very good, very tough."

The two chess enthusiasts are based together in a cluster of white caravans surrounded by razor wire on a bleak hilltop south of Hebron, where Israeli and Palestinian security forces have surprised a sceptical world by keeping the peace for a full month since Israeli troops withdrew from 80 per cent of this incendiary West Bank city.

Shaban is legal adviser to the local Palestinian commander, Engel is the Israeli media liaison at the district co-ordinating office.

The two sides of the shared headquarters are divided by a wire fence. But the gate between them is more often open than closed. Now they drink coffee together and even play volleyball across the wire.

It has not always been so relaxed. "The first time I sat playing chess on the Palestinian side," Engel says, "I found myself surrounded by 10 Arabs with Kalashnikovs automatics. I was very afraid."

It is only four months since Israeli and Palestinian forces exchanged fire in Ramallah and Nablus, two cities handed over earlier to Palestinian rule. If the initial uncertainty has subsided in the Hebron base, it remained palpable on a joint patrol I accompanied through an outlying Palestinian neighbourhood.

Paramilitary Israeli border police and Palestinian cops rode in separate jeeps. As the narrow road turned from asphalt to stones and rutted earth, the Israelis drew to one side and waved their Palestinian partners into the lead. Six weeks ago the border police were the hated enforcers of the occupation. They don't expect the Palestinians to forgive and forget quickly.

We stopped at Abu Simeh, a rocky plateau overlooking the ancient, contentious centre of Hebron, a hill city sacred to Jews and Muslims. To the right was the massive shrine of the patriarchs, where the warring faiths worship in sullen segregation. To the left was the Jewish quarter, home to 450 heavily guarded settlers. The joint patrol was there to make sure no vengeful Palestinian used the isolated site to snipe at the Jewish families down below.

"The Palestinian police have 15 checkpoints of their own to prevent demonstrations moving towards the Jewish enclave," explains the Israeli district commander. "We prevent Jewish demonstrations from our side."

"Every Palestinian police station has a rapid-response team, each with 16 men. On our side, soldiers have standing orders to stop any Israeli shooting at Palestinians. If necessary, they may open fire at him."

Asked if he fears a rerun of the gun battles between the two forces, an Israeli paramilitary shrugs: "I just hope our Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu] doesn't cock things up again."

Hebron simmers, but for now at least the only contest is at the chess board.

■ Jerusalem (Reuter) — Mr Netanyahu, warned by police about self-incrimination, has hired a lawyer to protect his interests in an investigation of alleged government corruption.

Vaakov Weimot told Army Radio Mr Netanyahu hired him on Saturday night: "He is certain the police will prove his innocence in this investigation."



On parade: One of the Russian Sea Cadet Corps saluting an officer on his first attendance at a title-receiving ceremony in Kronstadt, 50km south of St Petersburg, yesterday, the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland. Photograph: Reuters

international

Cold comfort from a dead man in winter

MOSCOW DAYS

One of the pleasures of an early morning walk in my neck of the woods is the chance to commune silently with Ho Chi Minh for a minute or two. His moonish face shines out of an oval monument that stands like a large up-turned bronze coin on the corner a few hundred yards from our monolithic apartment block.

For several years, he has stood there, casting an unmoving eye down on the tide of people who tramp out of the nearby metro station to mill around the scattering of kiosks, flower stands and vegetable stalls that stand along Trade Union Street at its junction with Dmitry Ulyanov Street (named after Lenin's brother).

At first, when I moved into our flat in south Moscow 15 months ago, I felt that Ho Chi Minh was an ugly presence, an outdated reminder of the Soviet Union's cynical support for the nationalist government in North Vietnam with the dual aim of maintaining the Communists' empire and containing the United States which - just as indefensibly - was launching massive bombing raids on behalf of Capitalism.

I placed him in the same category as the guards who control the barriers that separate our compound from the outside world, or the women who sit morosely in glass booths just inside the entrances of our building, inspecting every new arrival with a beady eye - a stark reminder of a darker era.

But now, contemplating his features on a bright blue winter's morning, I see him differently. With his goatee and little smile, he is an island of stability, a bastion of permanence in a restless and frosty landscape.

Everything around him is changing. When I arrived, he used to stand opposite the Hanoi, a down-at-heels gambling joint that had a spectacularly bad restaurant, staffed by a waiter so gloomy he could barely bring himself to present you with a menu. Its small clientele appeared chiefly interested in drinking into the night, and hobnobbing with young hostesses.

That's gone. Ho Chi Minh now stands opposite an establishment called Rocky-11, a chic wine bar which seeks to draw in passers-by by playing rock music from a loudspeaker which is padlocked to the front door, lest someone make off with it.

Young people gather around wooden tables to drink Corona beer, and to listen to the resident band. You could almost be in London or Paris, were it not for

the obviously down-at-heel population in the streets outside.

Not far away down Dmitry Ulyanov Street, where once stood a clapped-out repair shop whose staff still used an abacus to tot up their debts, we now have a salon where affluent Muscovite women can be waxed and plucked and trimmed in a parlour so modern that it has suction devices in the walls which whisk up discarded hair.

Further down the street, on the corner of a peeling, off-pink apartment block, hangs a small blue-coloured sign showing a female silhouette in repose. This advertises the other new arrival in the neighbourhood: a sex shop called Casanova.

Pornography was outlawed by the Communists, but it has been seized on with enthusiasm in capitalist Russia, finding a market even among a population which earns less than \$200 (£124) a month. But even here there is a Soviet touch: a sign in the door

You could almost be in London or Paris, were it not for the down-at-heel population in the streets'

says it closes at 7pm, so paying little heed to the rhythm of the average libido, or the best way to make money - for the Moscow streets do not become really fetal until a fair amount of vodka has flowed through the city's veins - usually after 10pm.

But the most striking development lies up Trade Union Street where we now have an enormous, overshadowing concrete and glass skyscraper housing a Russian bank, topped by a revolving green orb. I suppose this should be applauded as an example of the investment that Russia so desperately needs.

But, looking out of the ninth-floor apartment, I can't help feeling differently. I used to boast that, on a clear day, with binoculars, you could make out the towers of the Kremlin. All right, I know it's pitiful - but it made me feel as if I had a finger on the city's pulse.

But now, as I was silently complaining to Ho Chi Minh only the other day, all you can see is that hideous bank. He seemed to sympathise.

Phil Reeves

Tories move to cut ties with Albanian regime

Andrew Gumbel

After years of enthusiastic support, centre-right parties in western Europe, including the British Conservatives are rapidly distancing themselves from Albania's ruling Democratic Party because of growing concerns about corruption, police brutality and violations of basic political freedoms.

In the light of the DP's actions over the last year, we now have to review whether the party is one we would want to do business with," according to one source inside the Conservative Party.

Punitive action is expected to come early next month in Paris at a meeting of the European Democratic Union, a grouping of centre-right parties from across the Continent, including the DP and the Conservatives. At the very least, the party is expected to be put "on

probation". Most likely, it will have its EDU membership suspended, although outright expulsion is also possible.

Ostensibly, the main cause for concern is the heavy-handed use of uniformed and plainclothes police in quelling recent anti-government riots sparked by the collapse of Albania's get-rich-quick pyramid investment schemes. But given the EDU's reluctance to confront mounting evidence of human rights abuses over the past three years, the real issue seems to be a desire to disown the party before association turns into scandal.

Close links with the DP were once considered an ideological imperative for EDU member parties, but have become ever more embarrassing as the Albanian government has come under fire for everything from election-rigging to involvement in arms, drugs and petrol trafficking. In Britain, the Albanian connection has risked turning into an electoral liability for the Tories following reports in *The Independent* about Albanian government collusion in organised crime and questions asked in the House of Commons by Labour MP Denis MacShane.

Until last May's rigged general elections, media reports about corruption and political repression in Albania were rare, and European conservatives threw themselves enthusiastically into the pro-Berisha camp.

In Britain, Mr Berisha's greatest champion has been Sir Geoffrey Patric, former vice-chairman of the Conservative Party.

Some other Conservatives appear to be equally unwilling to criticise the Democratic Party. The secretary of the Westminster Conservative Association, Donald Stewart, said he had found the Democratic Party

connection has risked turning into an electoral liability for the Tories following reports in *The Independent* about Albanian government collusion in organised crime and questions asked in the House of Commons by Labour MP Denis MacShane.

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In Britain, Mr Berisha's greatest champion has been Sir Geoffrey Patric, former vice-chairman of the Conservative Party. The secretary of the Westminster Conservative Association, Donald Stewart, said he had found the Democratic Party

entirely bona fide" on three visits to Albania in the past 18 months. Conservative officials said that Mr Stewart and others would be asked to modify their views or at least stop espousing them on behalf of the party.

Similar sea-changes in attitude appear to be taking place in the rest of Europe, starting with Leni Fischer, president of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.

Ms Fischer is regarded in Albania as a Berisha apologist, but at the end of January her assembly issued the Thirana government with a list of demands on democratisation, the independence of the judiciary, press freedom and cross-party dialogue.

Challenged about her statements apparently supporting Mr Berisha in the past, her office said she had been misquoted and there was evidence of statements being fabricated in Albania to discredit her.

CLASSIFIED

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arts

Don't make a drama out of a critic

THEATRE

St Nicholas

The Bush Theatre,
London

Where could you find a set of people even half as unassuming, well-adjusted, life-loving, nurturing, and eager to embrace new experiences as a bunch of theatre critics? For some unaccountable reason, this tends not to be a perception shared by dramatists. It's as the epitome of self-hating failure that the theatre critic is privileged to feature in their works. Last year, a play on Off-Broadway, entitled *Arts and Leisure*, centred on a syndicated hack who had all but lost his humanity, the job having reduced him to judging moral issues and his own personal relationships in terms of what "works", or doesn't, theatrically. "There's something about racism in practice that works like a big cast-iron Broadway hit..."

Now, in *St Nicholas*, the new Conor McPherson one-man play at The Bush, a jaded Dublin theatre critic, lost in hard-drinking back hell, goes through a form of emotional breakdown which involves a tragicomic obsession with a beautiful young actress and, somewhat less conventionally, a period of time living with and working for a household of vampires in London. The 25-year-old author scored a hit last year at this address with *This Lime Tree Bower*, a drama of overlapping monologues in which three characters gave their different versions of one unlikely weekend in a small, seedy, Irish seaside resort. The piece was praised for its narrative grip and laconic comedy. For at least half of the new play, brilliantly performed by Brian Cox, these virtues are again on vibrant display.

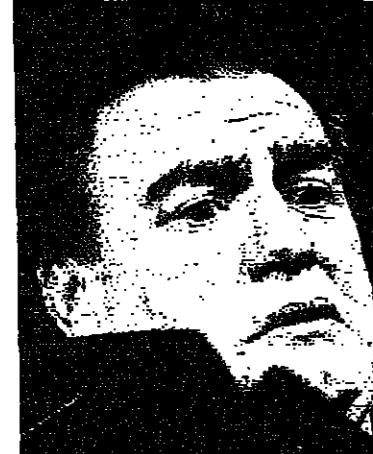
"I wanted to let my compassion seep out across the stage. Handicapped people in love. Queers and lesbians absolving each other. A liberal, fucking, all-encompassing... you know. But nothing came. Nothing ever came." Even when – especially when – recalling his now defunct idealism and creative ambitions, the tone is one of sardonic self-contempt, the lines timed with a wonderful off-hand scathingness and many a collusive hoist of the eyebrows by Mr Cox who, with his great, craggy, sensitive face and fleshy build, looks like an ex-university rugby player run to tiffsomething seed. Via flashes of swift, brutal insight ("I'd never taken the care to form an opinion. I just had them... 'drunken pig-headedness being past off as authority'... 'fuck you think I was going to surround myself with people who were succeeding?'"), the writing pulls you into an existence which, precisely because of its corrupting, pseudo-festive easiness and the cocoon provided by other befuddled failures, has become a kind of living death.

I much preferred the first half of the piece, where the reviewer, estranged from his family, gives excruciatingly hilarious accounts of the scraps he gets into because of his obsession with the actress. As a critic who has his notices written before the show is over, he engineers a pub encounter with the director and cast of the play she is in which he's just reviewed. He finds himself telling them that he's given the show a rave and becomes, under soul-searingly false pretences, the drunken toast of the party.

The second half has its drossieries, too, when, after further humiliations with this cast in London, the critic, granted a new supernatural sexual attractiveness, winds up pimping in clubs for a household of vampires. Come again? Well, quite, but then the question marks dangling over this tale seem to be the whole point, as the play turns into a rather clumping and contrived meditation on, and demonstration of, the responsible human need for stories to mean something. That rationale for its fancifulness did not, I'm afraid, stop the attention of this contemptible critic from drifting.

To 22 March. Booking: 0171-743 3388

Paul Taylor



Flashes of swift, brutal insight: Brian Cox as the jaded critic
Photograph: Geraint Lewis



Four little maids from school: children in the Glyndebourne cast, here in rehearsal, imagined a world without adults. Slowly they began to reveal adolescent secrets

Photograph: Mike Hoban

Little beggars' opera

While scholars in medieval Europe employed amanuenses, their eccentric counterparts in China used tiny monkeys to help with their labours. These docile creatures mixed ink, passed brushes and turned pages; off duty, they slept in the drawers of their masters' desks. This piquant fact, long forgotten, caused a stir last year when the monkey-breeding in question was found to be not extinct. At Glyndebourne this week it will cause a stir of a different sort, when an opera in which the pivotal image gets its first public airing.

This is outside the Sussex opera house's usual champagne-and-strawberries season, and the performers are not – with one or two exceptions – the usual bunch of operatic pros. The fictional setting is also unusual, in that it swings between a scholar's library in medieval China and bedrooms and playgrounds in Britain today. The plot turns on bullying, vandalism, and all the paraphernalia of contemporary teenage existence. A big hand, then, for the first children's opera ever to grace this exclusive stage.

Indeed, for a children's opera *tout court* – because there are remarkably few of them around. We have Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortiléges*, and Oliver Knussen's Maurice Sendak-scripted *Where the Wild Things Are*; but those are operas *about* childhood, composed for the delectation of grown-ups. As far as the real thing goes, we have *Noye's Fludde* by Benjamin Britten, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* (if you call that an opera), and precious little else (mostly by Peter Maxwell Davies). So, if your local school wants to do an end-of-term opera and has already done *Joseph* and *Noye*, Glyndebourne's latest offering might just be the answer.

Masterminded by Katie Tearle, Glyndebourne's head of education, *Misper* has its origins in three community operas mounted by the company over the past few years in Sussex, Kent and Cambridgeshire: the first, an epic history of the growth of St Leonards, performed in the ballroom at the end of Hastings Pier; the second, an allegorical response to the arrival of Eurotunnel, staged in an Ashford leisure centre at a time when the railway town seemed destined for a rude upheaval; the third, an equally allegorical fantasy about angels past and present, set partly in Peterborough Cathedral, partly on the up-and-down escalators of an adjoining shopping cen-

tre. But, tailor-made as these projects were to the particular interests and abilities of their participating communities, such specificity had its drawbacks, in that the works could not be staged anywhere else, or by any other performers.

As it happens, Glyndebourne Education had also been working on a project with the probation service, and Tearle suggested to her librettist, Stephen Plaice – a former writer-in-residence at Lewes top-security prison, better known for his work on ITV's *The Bill* – and her director, Stephen Langridge – son of the tenor Philip, and himself a leading light in opera-education (whose credits also include staging *West Side Story* in Wandsworth Prison) – that they develop an opera specifically for young performers, to be given in the festival theatre itself. "But we knew from the start," says Tearle, "that this would only work if we began by workshopping the piece in schools, and finding out what the children themselves wanted to see on stage."

Langridge and Plaice, together with the composer John Lunn, went into classrooms, listened, and learnt. "We started with open minds," says Langridge. "We did have a vague notion of something along the lines of *The Lord of the Rings*, but it quickly moved to a more contemporary arena. But we still noticed that it was when they imagined themselves in a world without adults that the children's ideas really took fire. That remained the principle which guided us. We got them to talk about things which are normally adolescent secrets – like what happens at a sleep-over. How do you get the alcohol for it? How do you get your X-rated film? And what do you do all night? It turns out that most of the time they're just sitting around, talking, and getting mildly and pleasurable frightened."

The other main area they got their juvenile collaborators to describe was the playground, and how it changed from primary to secondary school. "It was the difference between something totally open and excited and mixed-sex, and something grim, separated, and with no games except football. They told us that, if you carried on playing primary games in secondary school, you got written off as 'sad'. This tension became one of the keys to our opera."

Plaice, who more often haunts police stations in his researches for *The Bill*, decided to put his draft libretto through

Sleep-overs, playground rites of passage, Chinese monkeys.

Add the scriptwriter for *The Bill*, the composer for *Hamish Macbeth*, and Glyndebourne's first children's opera hits the stage.

By Michael Church



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decorating the final set should be historically accurate. "If authenticity is worth going for at all, it's worth going for 100 per cent."

Two hundred teenagers turned up for auditions last November. Casting the story's 13-year-old victim and 13-year-old heroine was no problem, but the part of the chief bully had to be advertised in the local papers. Each main role was double-cast, partly to take the strain off young voices, partly to give more performers a chance. The handful of adult roles are being filled by leading opera professionals, including Omar Ebrahim and Mary King.

A straw poll among the juve leads reveals that almost all want a stage career: none seem put off by its penury and precariousness. A boy whom I first noticed doing backflips and casually balancing upside-down on a chair turns out to be a champion tumbler, with designs on the next Olympics. Another wants to be a professional mountain-biker (professions sound fun these days). Some have already worked as operatic extras: those for whom this is a first experience are high on the excitement, though in many cases visibly shocked to discover, during rehearsals, that the part which has engulfed their lives is a mere brushstroke on the grander canvas. The alternative casts are being exceptionally nice about each other, gallantly praising one another's qualities, though rivals – surprise, surprise – are discernible beneath the surface.

On the day I attend rehearsals, the technical director is totting up the cost of 42 monkey-suits and tails, the score, with its clever interweaving of pro and amateur voices, is still – 14 days from curtain-up – in final gestation; and the conductor, Andrea Quinn (already an old hand at dealing with young performers thanks to her regular job as Music Director of the London Philharmonic Youth Orchestra), is trying to induce her novice opera singers to project their sound. This is their first day in the real auditorium, and they are fazed by the yawning chasm of the pit. When they reach the end of the run-through, and the chief ink-monkey crawls back into his master's drawer, the stage is full of misty eyes and lumps in throats. For this is Glyndebourne. And this is them doing it.

Misper: schools matinee 3pm Thurs (all seats £9); public performances 3pm Fri, 2pm/3pm Sat (children £9/£7, adults £7/£9), at Glyndebourne Opera House, in Lewes, East Sussex. Booking: 01273 815025

You can learn a great deal about a conductor in the moments before the first downbeat. For at least 30 seconds, Daniel Gatti stood stock-still before the Royal Philharmonic strings at the start of his Barbican Hall concert last Friday. He didn't wait for silence, he actively encouraged it. His composure became our composure, his patience our patience. And only when he was sure that the atmosphere was ripe for exploration did he raise his hands. The music of Schoenberg's *Kurdine Nach* effectively began before a single note was sounded. Actually "sound" is too strong a word. These first notes were so pale and interesting, so remote as not to seem like music at all. Rather the sounds of silence, anticipation, disquiet. The "transfigured night" of Schoenberg's title.

Gatti has a wonderful nose for atmosphere, drama, the *theatre* of music. But beyond that – as befitting an Italian whose roots are, of course, in opera – there is his instinctive way with phrasing. The singer's way. Already he's encouraging from his RPO strings a freer, more flexible, more imperative manner. Be aware of the shape and purpose of the phrase, he's saying, and the sound will follow. There's still a lot of work to be done. But this performance of the Schoenberg was notable above all for the way in

CLASSICAL

RPO / Daniele Gatti

Barbican Hall, London

which the febrility of the music was conveyed "on the breath". That's breathtaking in the literal sense of the word. Those little turns of expression, the falling away of the voice and other "vocal" mannerisms. Even where the music inclined towards hyperbolization, there was shape. The dappled closing pages, tenuous violin arpeggios catching the moonlight, were still vibrating long after Gatti's hands had stopped moving.

Of Alicia de Larrocha's somewhat retiring account of Ravel's G major Piano Concerto, suffice it to say that the distinguished sephragonian now has to watch her step for fear of losing her footing. Easily done in the snappy outer movements which streak from the roaring Twenties like there's no tomorrow. Gatti nursed her through the problems (and one conspicuous memory lapse) like a good son, but even the raucous E-flat clarinet was momentarily thrown off

balance by the unease of it all. Still, at least we got to eavesdrop de Larrocha quietly reminiscing her way through the central *Adagio assai*. And for a moment or two there was no charmer like an old charmer. Nights in the gardens of... well, Ravel was a Basque.

It was not a piece one would expect to be looking back on from the connoisseurs opening pages of Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung* ("Death and Transfiguration"). Indeed, in the circumstances, the juxtaposition was perhaps even a little unfortunate. But Gatti once again effected the change of mood with great skill, deep breathing his way through an operatic account of the long introduction, solos from oboe, flute, and solo violin drifting in and out of our consciousness like tiny arioso. The life-death struggle generated a lot of heat, the timpani's cross-rhythms slicing across the bar like convulsions. With each restatement of the transfiguration theme I was increasingly put in mind of Toscanini's famous recording. It was that exciting, that intense, the transfiguration itself a real Jacob's ladder affair, slow and exalted with trombones and horns bravely nailing those final rungs of the heavenly ascent. The tempestuous violin arpeggios catching the moonlight were still vibrating long after Gatti's hands had stopped moving.

Edward Seckerson

CLASSICAL

Sinfonia 21 St John's

London Sinfonietta QEH

Friday's Queen Elizabeth Hall concert in "Sounding the Century", George Benjamin conducting the London Sinfonietta. Three more of Stravinsky's essays in popular or jazz styles, *Tango*, *Preludes* and the *Elton Concerto*, made for an interesting silence before he answered: "Perhaps." He might have thought to point out that decay brought rich fermentation, and why did Szymborska's perfectly exquisite score need to be defined by the possible influences on it? That was a more pertinent consideration in the case of Claude Vivier's *Lonely Child* (1981), since the Canadian composer reacted against his avant-garde formation with an incantatory style dressed in weird but pleasing microtonal chords that evoked a newly invented exoticism. Varese's *Ocarina* opened

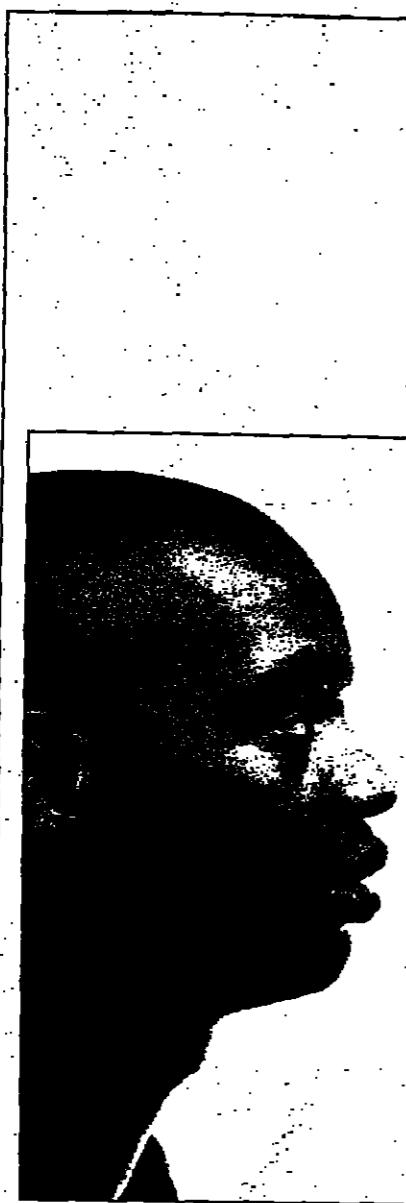
other end of the composer's intervening thought processes, were two "Transitoires", each roughly 15 minutes, followed by "Originel", about six minutes, linked by two very brief electronic sections, when the lights dramatically went down. Scored for eight strings (stage right), seven brass and seven woodwind (stage left) with three solo flutes in front of them, the music confirmed with proliferating arabesques and recognisable patterning.

The first "Transitoire" was breathless and shimmering. The second began more broadly flowing, admitted more varied gestures and a sense of relaxation. "Originel", giving one solo flute (Sophie Cherrier), very cool and collected, the lime-light waited

Adrian Jack

Tomorrow in the Tabloid: Tom Lubbock on Lovis Corinth at the Tate. Plus more from Dr Phil Hammond

هذا من الأصل



Designer Warren Griffiths (above) has turned to his high-flying customers to model his collection for London Fashion Week. **Katie Sampson** talks to three of them about what the Nineties career woman really wants to wear



Efua Baker, singer, songwriter and former model (left)

When I was younger the desire to buy a particular designer garment or beauty treatment could completely consume me, but I'm glad to say I no longer live in that constant state of misery. I still love clothes but I've become more choosy over the years and I now hate shopping. In the last six years, since having a family, I've become increasingly turned on by clothes that are washable and durable and whereas I was once willing to fork out for a £60 face cream containing caviar I now swear by beauty products like Vaseline. Recently I rang a shop to complain about an expensive designer jumper which had disintegrated after three wears and the assistant said "but you're not supposed to wear it that much!" — how ridiculous!

I dress for myself nowadays and it is important to me that I feel good in what I am wearing. At the moment I'm keen on my beige army trousers with big pockets — actually I probably wear them a little too often as they are so easy to match with a sparkle top and a pair of Prada slip-ons for inside/outside wear. I like eclectic outfits, but they usually include something special. I won't wear clothes that give me a slouchy feeling: I believe that if your clothes are stained or saggy then that's

how you end up feeling. For this reason I also dress for bed; I stand in my wardrobe and think about nightwear that reflects the mood I am in or want to be in. My friends think I'm nuts, but it makes sense to me.

My wardrobe is humungous, but I have the excuse of sharing it with my husband Jazzy B [of Soul II Soul] and he has a devastating collection of clothes — unlike me, he never buys one-off rubbish items. I've got a lot of shoes, many of which I rarely wear, some never. I also borrow things from my daughter's dressing up box since things that look ridiculous one year can look great the next, a pink shirt with frills for example.

I like the recent trend of using more real people on the runway since there's nothing especially inspiring about supermodels. The fact that the model is a person doesn't come into many designer minds.

In my experience London Fashion Week doesn't mean much for people's wardrobes. I will be going to a couple of the shows but more for the social side of it. I am definitely more interested in seeing interesting genuine people wearing genuine things than models whose clothes appear to be wearing them.



Jenny Runacre, actress and artist (above)

Most of the clothes in my wardrobe are variations on a similar theme. For example, I've always worn men's suits, mainly because I'm tall with broad shoulders which makes them the most comfortable of garments. I also like wearing mini skirts and have a fabulously elegant Antony Price cocktail dress which I've been wearing for years and years. I have never had that desperate need to know what is being worn for this season. I prefer unusual, comfortable and stylish clothes which I can put together myself. If I can find a garment incorporating all these factors I am likely to buy it and wear it again and again.

Designer gear is so wonderful when it's well cut or hangs nicely that I will save up for something like a Yohji Yamamoto or a pair of Manolo Blahnik shoes, but I don't necessarily go looking for expensive clothes. Sometimes I discover a shop like Warch's, fall in love with a particular line and stick with it, yet I am just as likely to go to find something fabulous at Kensington or Camden Market. Part of the art of dressing is the ability to accompany a garment with the right accessories in such a way that no one necessarily knows where the outfit is from.

For an actress I am a little off-beat in the way that I dress. In order to be even considered for a glamorous part in a big budget film one needs to dress accordingly for the audition, designer gear, usually involving 'legs' rather than trousers, and everything accounted for down to the last detail. But fringe shows allow you to wear more or less what you wish, which in my case could well be combat trousers, a long-sleeved T-shirt and my DM boots with the ubiquitous leather jacket.

Few people want to be dowdy and there's nothing wrong with following fashion, but being enslaved to it gives the impression of the wearer not being entirely sure either of their identity or what they want from life. I prefer the simplicity of clothes you can take home without being taken over, clothes with enough room for your own personality. One of my teenage daughters is in a band and when I watch them dressing up it's riveting because of the totally individual way that they style their look.

Meet the new model army

Margaret O'Rourke, sculptor and potter

What does the successful career woman really want from her clothes? As London Fashion Week kicks off, this is the sink or swim question exercising the minds of designers, buyers and retailers as the attempt to transplant catwalk glamour and grit to street level begins.

The designer Warren Griffiths may have found the answer in his "Votes for Women" collection which he launches today. Eschewing the costly formality of the traditional show using models "of perfection", Griffiths has chosen to unveil his autumn/winter collection from his own shop using seven of his customers — including an investment banker, a barrister and a sculptor — as "role models".

"I want to dress dynamic women — my muse is the type of woman who has a lifestyle I admire and emulate," he says. "I'm not interested in dressing young girls."

His inspiration comes from hearing his customers discuss what they need from an outfit; the results are clothes which are conversation pieces in themselves. The materials used include reflective glass thread, paper, silk, denim and raffia. Yet these garments are far from eccentric; the fabrics are sculpted into outfits that tend to transcend the boundaries between daytime and evening wear. Here, three of Griffiths' models wear clothes from the new collection and reveal exactly what they look for when preparing to shell out their own hard-earned cash on a garment.

Warren Griffiths, 30 Lamb's Conduit Street, London WC1N 3LE (0171-404 3987)

I used to make my clothes, but since I started pottery 10 years ago I've had no time for anything but work. Consequently I spend most of my life in legging and T-shirts. I work in these outfits and am ashamed to say that I also pop out to the shops in them, but I've always gone to a good hairdresser and will spend a lot of money on shoes — the last pair cost about £140 from Pied à Terre.

There is an irony in the fact that the more successful you become, the less time you have to look it, yet a successful look is expected of you. I need to find clothes to suit a limited budget that will also feel and look special — wonderful, casual and comfortable clothes.

Dressing-up becomes difficult as you get older, because you want to look attractive yet not overly sexy. Frantically busy professional women need to be able to rely on clothes that they feel and look good in. For me there's the additional desire to have sculptural clothes that move with the body. I don't need fashion for my sense of well-being, but I do admire spiritual, fun and comfortable clothes.

When I met Warren it was a magical experience, because his constant search for materials was totally unusual, much more akin to an artist's outlook.

It always amazes me that you can see wonderful, glittering things in fashion shows yet the outfit of the average woman in the street looks far from exciting. Drabness saddens me desperately. We all know that you feel different when you put on something you love, yet people seem frightened to express themselves with clothes.

I don't feel pressurised to dress in a certain way because I want my outfits to be right for me. I certainly won't dress to fit in with someone else's ideal. You shouldn't say things that you don't mean and you shouldn't wear things that you don't feel are right for you either. I would suggest that people who've got the time should go to the London fashion week as a means of stimulating the imagination, but whatever you do, don't take what's on show as "the truth".



Jenny Runacre, actress and artist (above)

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A night for Lethal Lisa, big momma of the Brits

Plummy voice, size 18 and a match for Michael Jackson's choreographers. David Lister meets the woman who brought the awards global recognition



Lisa Anderson: 'I talk posh. That's the way I am'

When Jonathan King sends round robins to key figures in the music industry complaining about vote-rigging at the Brit awards, a constant target of the barbs in his highly entertaining missives is a woman he calls Lethal Anderson.

For Lethal read Lisa. She can be lethal and had to be last year when Jarvis Cocker took the Michael Jackson's choreographers, far more burly than choreographers have a right to be, tried in choreographic parlance to land him one. Cocker attempted to flee the building. Choreographers gave chase. Lisa Anderson weighed in and kept the warring artists apart.

The Brit awards tonight will not just celebrate the best of British pop. They will also make £300,000 profit for the Brit School for young musicians and be televised across Britain and America. Anderson can take a lot of the credit

for that success, yet outside the record industry she is almost unknown.

She was the first woman to head a record company when she became managing director of RCA in 1989. When she was sacked after some internal politicking, the major record labels asked her to replace the ubiquitous Jonathan King and become executive producer of the Brits.

After six years of Anderson, the Brits is now an internationally known, brand name, the voting structure has been democratised, it brings in £300,000 a year, compared with the £10,000 it made in 1990, is televised across the UK and America, and is the rock event of the year. She switched the television contract from the BBC which didn't pay, to independent television, which did, and had the brochure magazine sold in 2,500 shops.

Last year's Jarvis v Jackson spectacle was probably one of its greatest moments. How did she deal with it? "I'm a big woman with an imposing voice," she explains. Which is probably more than enough to frighten Michael Jackson.

Actually, while she does harp on about her size rather, Anderson does not come across as big at all, more like the elegant but pert 45-year-old mother that she is. "Oh, come on," she choruses, shaking her black curly "how can you be elegant and a size 18? And I'm wearing a vest."

The vest can be put down to living in a 15th century Kent mansion with David Campbell, former manager of UB40, currently house-husband, and their children, Hereward ("yes, he loves the name") and Hannah.

The children are deprived of only one adolescent prerequisite. Mum tends to rave about the latest bands even before they do. "It's a bit of a problem for me. Your first rebellion is

finding a piece of music and you hope your parents don't like it. But I like the same music as my kids."

With a plummy voice and hearty, infectious laugh, she does not sound like a music industry person. She certainly does not talk like the woman whose duties have included marketing the Sex Pistols.

"I know," she acknowledges, "when I came in to the industry 20 years or so ago everyone still found it necessary to speak like David Bailey. But I just couldn't be bothered with all that. I talk posh. I'm middle class. That's the way I am. I'm not going to disguise it."

She did make one pledge. "I made a decision not to suffer from guilt about leaving the children or from jet lag."

"During my record company years it was going on all around, lots of booking on sofas and other extra-curricular activities. But I never got involved in all that. When Richard Branson tried to throw me in the swimming pool, I simply glared at him and said, 'No, Richard. I've been to public school. I've done all that, been there. Don't.'

affirmations delivered as a crescendo.

Perhaps she was thinking of the sales conferences she had to attend preceded by the statutory soft porn videos. "They would say to me, 'Where's your sense of humour?'" I said. "Evidently not in my cock." It's like a club. It's all geared to going into a clam, into a posse. And generally speaking women don't do posse. Someone said that in the music biz either you are a babe or an ersatz boy, unless you're over 35 in which case you're an old dog. It's so true.

"During my record company years it was going on all around, lots of booking on sofas and other extra-curricular activities. But I never got involved in all that. When Richard Branson tried to throw me in the swimming pool, I simply glared at him and said, 'No, Richard. I've been to public school. I've done all that, been there. Don't.'

the leader page

In government, Labour must learn to say no

If the opinion polls are right, Tony Blair is heading for a bigger landslide victory in nine weeks' time even than the 144-seat majority Margaret Thatcher won in 1983. The conventional wisdom is that Labour's lead in the polls will narrow as polling day beckons. There is no reason why it should. The economy may be improving, but it has been for some time and John Major's ministers seem quite incapable of taking time out from July's Conservative leadership contest to put on a facade of unity.

The Labour lead seems to have fallen since the turn of the year, but only because Gallup belatedly came into line with other pollsters, revamping its survey methods completely and adjusting its figures to take 'reluctant Tories' into account. In fact, the gap between the parties has hardly changed for a whole year now: since last February the Tories have gained about three points, two from the Liberal Democrats, one from Labour.

However, the conventional wisdom is right in the sense that the disparity between Blair and Major does not feel as great as that between Thatcher and Foot. She had just won a war, and the Labour Party was a shambles. And, even after all the agonising and adjusting in the number-crunching fraternity over the failure of the opinion polls last time,

there remains scope for scepticism about their figures now. There has been some evidence from large random surveys that adjusted polls are still overstating Labour's lead, perhaps by as much as five percentage points. The average Labour lead over the past month of 18 points would be cut to 13 points. Even so, this would give Mr Blair a majority of more than 100 seats – the sort of margin by which Mrs Thatcher won in 1987.

The *Independent* will enter the fray next month with polls of its own, carried out by Harris Research. We will report our findings in more cautious terms than our rivals, and we will try to present a balanced picture based on all polling and other evidence. For the moment, however, unless this week's Wirral South by-election suggests a dramatic Tory recovery, that picture is of Mr Blair heading into a general election set fair to form a majority Labour government.

So, it is fair to probe a bit deeper into the gap between the positions espoused by Mr Blair and his team now and what they would actually do in government. For the campaign until 1 May will not be about the outcomes a Labour government would like to see, but about catching out the Tories and avoiding being caught out. Nor do the issues which dominate election campaigns usually dom-



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inate the government that follows.

Most of the challenges that the new administration will face will be those of governance rather than policy. Northern Ireland may be relapsing into conflict; there will be testing negotiations on a new European treaty to be concluded in a few weeks, contentious legislation for Scottish devolution to put through the Commons plus the trials of the unexpected.

We know how ill-prepared Labour was in 1964, after 13 years out of power. So Mr Blair's lot have been to management school, they have talked

to eager civil servants, and on policy they have done all their betraying before they drew up their manifesto nearly a year early.

Much depends on the relationships between Labour's "big guns", Brown, Cook and Prescott, who do not get on. This is the context for persistent speculation about the personalities and dispositions of a Labour Cabinet. Weekend reports suggest John Prescott has been promised the Deputy Prime Minister title he wants, as well as a big department such as Environment and Transport merged. If this raises the profile of green

issues, fine, but the real question is whether title-fights and empire-building would get in the way of sound administration.

However, Mr Blair is unlikely to tolerate the kind of ministerial indiscipline that has plagued Mr Major: the threat of the sack would be real because there are talented middle-rankers waiting their turn, and he would at least start with backbenchers free of embittered ex-ministers.

So if Mr Blair wants to give his government a sense of direction, he would be well placed to do so. But it is still unclear what that would be. We hope democratic reforms will gain a momentum of their own if the question of how we are governed is opened up, but, like Roy Jenkins's liberalising social reforms of the 1960s, that would probably happen against the grain of the Prime Minister's cautious instincts.

It is sometimes argued that devolution and electoral reform would be a good way of making the country feel as if a Labour government had made a difference at a time when the scope for action on "bread-and-butter" issues of prosperity and jobs is so limited. But we do not advocate them for that reason: our argument is that extending and enriching democracy is part of taking on vested interests, spreading wealth and improving life-chances for all.

Certainly, a new government's room for economic manoeuvre would be limited. But it will be all the more so if Mr Blair fails to take on the Establishment. Already his unwillingness to say that anyone would lose out under Labour is unconvincing: in government it would be disastrous.

The Euro-sceptic song contest

The Referendum Party has found another fun way to spend Sir James Goldsmith's £20m, by recording a single called "Let the People Decide". There's enough material now for a Media Studies PhD on the history of polit-pop, starting with "Seven-and-a-half Per Cent Swing" by the Floating Voters in 1970. After "Let's Go Liberal", featuring David Steel's voice over a thumping disco beat, in the 1979 election, it would be dominated by you-know-who, with "Hello Maggie" (1979) and "It's Maggie For Me" (1983), by Vince Hill, and, for balance, "Stand Down Margaret" by The Beat, which made it to Number 22 in 1980. But, given Sir James's recent difficulties, it is the subtitle of the new single that gets our vote: "The Rabble Army Song."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Russian myth of 'betrayal' by Nato

Sir: Andrei Olenin writes (letter, 19 February) that "the post-German unification process has shown that Nato reneged on its pledge not to expand eastwards after the Warsaw Pact's dissolution. Why should we believe Nato this time?"

In the "German unification process", Soviet fears were certainly addressed by a treaty commitment that the only forces stationed in former East Germany would be "German units of territorial defence which are not integrated into alliance structures" (Keeling's Record of World Events, 37/1). Has this been violated?

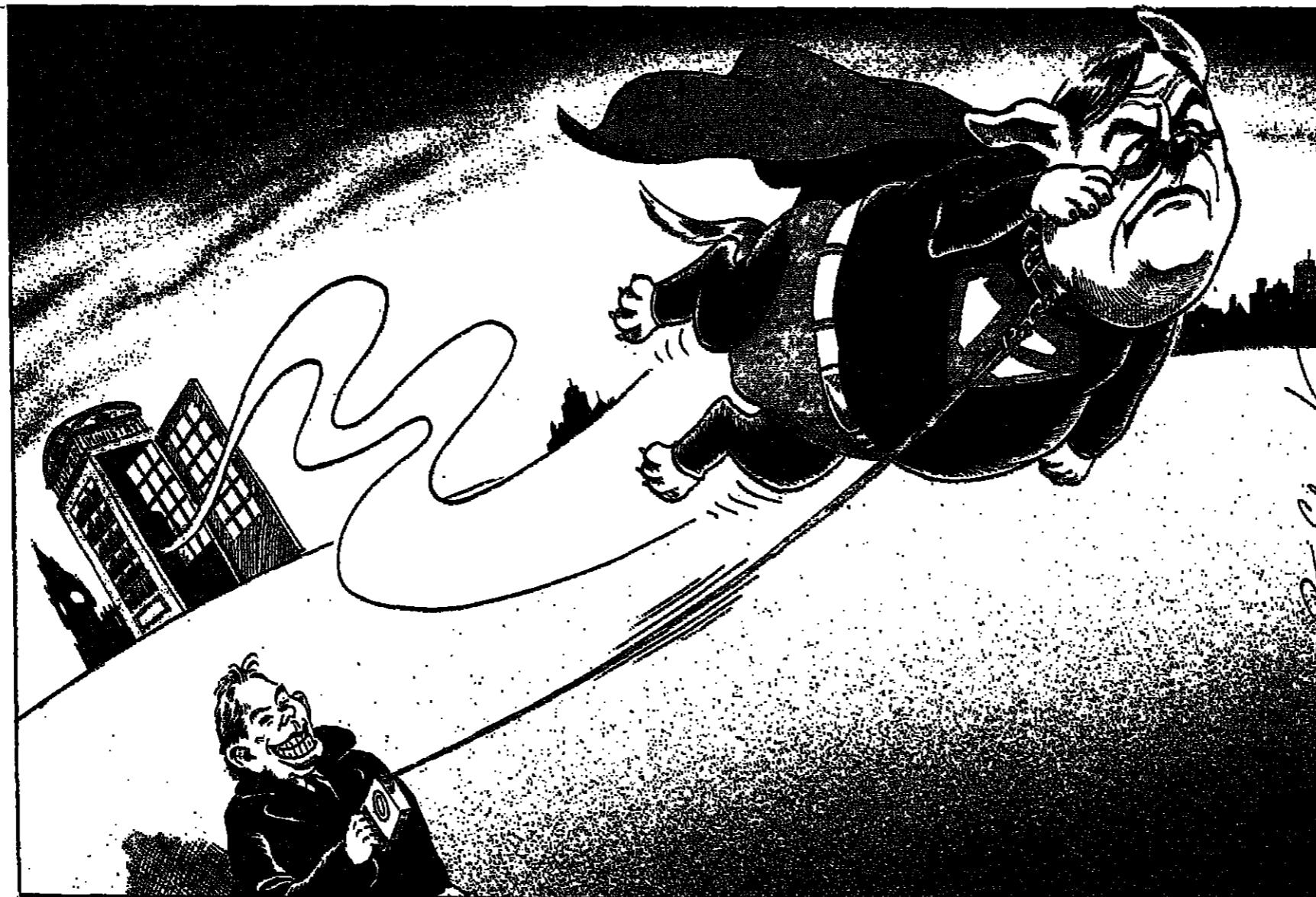
The treaty contained no clauses relative to the Warsaw Pact's dissolution, since that was not then internationally assumed – indeed, the Convention Forces in Europe treaty then being negotiated was based on the principle of force parity (within Europe) between Nato and the Warsaw Pact, the assumption being that both would continue, though no longer adversaries.

The Pact was, however, falling to pieces, and it formally decided in February 1991 on the early dissolution of its military structures. That month Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary sought "total integration into the European political, economic, security and legislative order", which, they soon made clear, they took to include Nato membership.

Nato thus had to respond to the wish of many ex-Warsaw Pact members to join. It was initially cool: foreign ministers declared in June 1991 that "we will not seek unilateral advantage from the changed situation in Europe nor threaten the legitimate interests of any state", and in October Nato officials are reported as stating that the organisation was "not prepared to entertain the notion of membership" for ex-Warsaw Pact countries (Keeling's, 38/13, 38554).

Half a decade later there has been a reversal of this attitude, and one can argue as to whether or not the change was wise. But I am not sure that it equates with the renegeing on a "pledge", as claimed by Mr Olenin. Perhaps he has further justification. But to a casual observer, it looks rather as if a potentially dangerous "Western betrayal" myth is building.

J P D DUNBAIN
St Edmund Hall, Oxford



justified on security or any other ground. This treatment has rightly been condemned by Amnesty International as cruel, inhuman and degrading.

In October last year, Professor Joseph Rothblat, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, appealed personally to President Weizman to show clemency to Vanunu, but to no avail. Now there is another opportunity for us to make known our concern for Vanunu's well-being. We call on politicians and members of the public to join with us in the humanitarian appeal for the immediate release of

Mordechai Vanunu.

PETER BENENSON
PETER PRICE
ANDREW WILSKI
BRUCE KENT
JAKOB VON UEXKULL
*Trustees for the Campaign to Free Vanunu
London SE1*

Invest to boost UK exports

Sir: If the Lords survive and British manufacturing goes down the plughole, it will be because, as an ancient duce once told me: "Businessmen are so inarticulate."

There is no point in asking whether investment in the UK is "unusually low" ("Rust belt romantics", 20 February). The question is whether it is as high as we need, and the answer is a resounding "No."

It is clearly not high enough to employ the two million who are out of work and cut their £5bn annual cost to the exchequer, nor to recover our long-standing trade surplus in manufacturing.

Diane Coyle says that "private sector business investment is about the same, relative to the size of the economy, as in the other big advanced economies". But that condemns us to an economy which is not big enough to give us the exports needed to balance our trade, nor to pay for the long-neglected demands of the public sector, health, education and housing.

Diane Coyle's eminent businessmen cannot increase industrial investment by waving a wand. The cost of financing investment in the UK is 40 per cent higher than that of our nearest continental rivals because we will insist on keeping a yo-yo currency which adds to the risk of investment for export and which also has a long-standing tendency to inflation. The political rhetoric which wraps the Union Jack round our depreciated currency leaves hard-headed businessmen cold.

The substitute for the rust-belt industries is a rate of investment in new products high enough to overtake our competitors again and regain the share of trade which we lost in the Eighties. We will not do that so long as the high risk of investment in sterling enables our main continental competitors to put down 40 per cent more investment – 40 per cent more new products – for the same interest cost.

Sir FRED CATHERWOOD
Balsam, Cambridge
(The author was Conservative Member of the European Parliament for Cambridge and North Bedfordshire from 1984-94)

Why do farmers waste water?

Sir: The climate must not carry the whole can for water shortages ("It's a rainer than average February, so why are the water companies talking again about crisis?", 22 February).

Many years ago, my father taught me to water the garden only after sundown. The plants don't scorch and the water is put to best use by sinking into the soil overnight without significant evaporation.

So why are farmers allowed to flog our precious water supplies heavenwards in the heat of the day? Last summer, in this region of East Anglia, such wasteful practice was observed daily, often in temperatures of 80F and over.

Given that farmers either tap into valuable and ever-diminishing aquifer sources, or abstract from rivers which eventually feed reservoirs, can the extravagant daytime use of this method of irrigation be justified?

MARGARET THOMPSON
*Secretary, The Prayer Book Society
London EC4*

Becket and I

Sir: David Aaronovitch (comment, 15 February) attributes to me several weird views which I certainly do not hold.

It is because I believe my fellow citizens deserve and can appreciate the best that has been thought and said in the realms of doctrine, liturgy and worship, that I am a member of the Prayer Book Society, which

aims to keep the Book of Common Prayer in use in the church.

At the time I was approached for comment, I was given the impression that the Becket relic was to be permanently returned to the Cathedral, not just for exhibition purposes. I stick to the belief that the shifting of human remains from one venue to another, except for some dire necessity, is lacking in respect. The placing of them on open display for the purpose of tourism is similarly disrespectful, and if it is done to encourage pilgrimage or prayer then it indicates a pre-Reformation theology in which prayer offered in the presence of relics has more validity than other prayer.

MARGARET THOMPSON
*Secretary, The Prayer Book Society
London EC4*

Tip for Gummer

Sir: Your leading article on John Gummer and his warnings of global warming (22 February) concludes with the advice to tax energy. Whether not disagreeing, I feel that it would be better if you advised him not to tax attempts to save energy.

If I buy loft insulation, pay a contractor to put in cavity wall insulation, pay for double glazing, or buy energy-efficient light bulbs – all as advocated by our government – that same government sits back rubbing its hands in glee and pocketing 17.5 per cent VAT on the value of my purchases.

S C BLACK
Newton Aycliffe, Co Durham

Red Cross list of war babies

Sir: The case of four-year-old Edita Keranovic ("Family furious as judge says war baby must stay", 18 February) highlights the reasons why the Red Cross takes specific steps to ensure that families living in armed conflict situations either remain together or are reunited as soon as possible.

The British Red Cross keeps a register for all children coming into the country without their parents or usual carers. This register allows us to hold, in confidence, details on young people which will help us to locate them and restore family contact should there be an enquiry from a parent or close relative via the Red Cross International Tracing and Messages Services. We ask that anyone looking after a child from abroad makes sure that we have this vital information.

No doubt there will be a number of cases similar to Edita's where foster parents in Britain wish to adopt Bosnian children in their charge.

The Red Cross urges that enquiries are first undertaken, and properly followed up, through the Red Cross, to find out if relatives are still alive and able to care for such children.

In our experience, tracing enquiries can take some time and a period of least two years should elapse before any adoption procedures begin.

This allows time for information to be gathered and a family reunion to take place if circumstances allow.

SANDRA SINGER
*British Red Cross
London SW1*

Labour hesitation over gay rights

Sir: I share Peter Tatchell's disappointment that Labour appears to have withdrawn its pledge, made in 1992, to introduce anti-discrimination legislation for the gay community ("Labour gives pledge on age of gay consent", 20 February).

But he is perhaps a little overzealous in his criticisms. Jack Straw's speech this week is a signal that the shadow front bench is beginning at long last to show steadier nerves on lesbian and gay issues, and is therefore to be welcomed.

If, as we are told, "New Labour" is intent on making only those promises it can and will keep, then it may yet become the party of government that sets rolling the wheel of change on homosexual issues that was loosened, and no more, by the age of consent debate three years ago.

Here's to a ray of cautious optimism.

JOHN JACKSON
London SW1

Sir: The continuing confusion over the application of Section 28 is just one of many reasons why this piece of legislation should be repealed.

Section 28 of the Local Government Act applies to the activities of local authorities and not to the activities of schools as stated in your report.

The Department of Education circular 59/93 Education Act 1993 – sex education in schools clarifies the situation. Section 28 does not apply to sex education in schools.

The policy and content of school sex education is the responsibility of school governors and not the local authority.

GILL LENDERYOU
*Senior Development Officer
Sex Education Forum
London EC1*

Sir: As an eminent scientist Richard Dawkins (Letters, 19 February) should allow the concept of likelihood to inform his judgement.

It is highly unlikely that, now or ever, any woman would wish to abort a foetus that showed genetic signs of basketball incompetence – few poor ball-players are the focus of social malice and abuse.

Some homosexuals, however, are subject to such malice and abuse (sometimes from their mothers and their fathers). There is therefore a stronger likelihood of suspected homosexuals being aborted.

To allow the reinforcement of this likelihood would appear to condone the "stamping out" of homosexuality. It should not be surprising that homosexuals take offence at such a notion.

LAN FLINTOFF
London SW6

My ancestor was killed at Benin

Sir: I totally agree with the Labour MP Bernie Grant about returning the Benin artefacts to their rightful owners ("The looting of Benin", 22 February).

I am writing to Mr Grant to organise compensation for the descendants of the brave and heroic people killed during the rape of Benin in 1897 – one of whom was my great-grandfather.

OLOGBOSEERE
London E12

I to say

The Euro-song
Song contest

Counting the £10bn cost of British illiteracy

Michael Barber

The Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank recruits employees from over 50 different national education systems. It is not alone. Each day that passes, more businesses find themselves recruiting staff globally. This has profound implications for our national education system. Unless its standards match those of the best worldwide, our young people may find that in the global job market they fall far behind their peers from Singapore, New Zealand or Germany. They will have been betrayed.

In setting up the Literacy Task Force, which will report on Thursday, David Blunkett anticipated this challenge. Its task has been to design a strategy which, if pursued over a five to ten year period, would ensure that all eleven-year-olds could not only read but read well. If we want our school and college leaving standards to match the best in the 21st century, we must first ensure that reading standards are transformed.

In the 1996 national tests, only 57 per cent of pupils achieved or exceeded the standard expected of eleven year olds. International comparisons suggest that in literacy we are in the second division, well behind New Zealand and the United States, to mention just English-speaking examples. Most worryingly of all, we have a long tail of under-performing schools not just in urban areas. The costs to a country of illiteracy, in lost business, remedial education, crime and benefit payments have been calculated by accountants Ernst & Young to be over £10 billion per annum.

The present government has put the issue of literacy on the agenda. It has also robustly and repeatedly criticised primary teachers for not teaching properly. Yet – amazingly – there has never been a major national initiative to enable all primary teachers to learn the most effective methods of teaching reading. No wonder so many primary teachers are bewildered and confused. As the criticism is heaped upon them, they find themselves basing their teaching approach upon a distant recollection of what they learnt when they trained. This is an unacceptably haphazard state of affairs.

No wonder so many primary teachers are bewildered

The Literacy Task Force report will show how – for less than £20 million a year over 4 years, a sum which can easily be contained within present levels of education expenditure – all 190,000 primary teachers could be enabled to teach reading in accordance with internationally tried and tested best practice.

The most powerful exemplars are to be found in United States, Australia and New Zealand. The Success for All project run by Bob Slavin from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore uses upbeat, fast-paced teaching of the whole class. Children are systematically taught phonics. Smaller groups are also used to reinforce the message. The central principles which underpin Slavin's programme are clear: prevention is better than cure; intervention should be early and intensive (which demands that pupils are regularly assessed), a belief that every student can succeed; and a relentless determination to pursue the agreed approach.

This, and a similarly successful programme in Victoria, Australia demonstrate that radical improvements in literacy standards are possible. We now need to apply these lessons strategically in all 20,000 primary schools in England. New Zealand has come closest to achieving this goal. We may be able to beat them at cricket but in rugby and literacy they leave us standing. The key to their approach is to ensure that the vast majority of children – 80 per cent or more – learn to read first time through being taught properly. Through an intensive but brief period of one-to-one teaching for those who have fallen behind at age six – an approach called reading recovery – a further fifteen per cent learn to read. The remaining 5 per cent, many of whom have severe learning difficulties, have the support of an individual learning plan and many of these, too, will learn to read ultimately.

Once best practice has been adopted across the country as the Task Force proposes, Reading Recovery will make sense here too, especially if it can become more cost effective.

The proposals, to be published on Thursday, blend the international experience with the best work here. On that firm foundation we propose a programme of training which will enable every primary teacher to use the most effective methods. As standards of literacy rise, primary teachers will gain the respect from the public that their work deserves. The first step towards the transformation of standards is believing that we can do it. The evidence proves we can.

Professor Michael Barber of the Institute of Education, London University, is chairman of the Literacy Task Force.



To deny that some are brighter than others, and that it's predictable from our genes, is to deny Darwinism

What your genes reveal about you

Nature and nurture is not an either/or issue, says Richard Dawkins

Polly Toynbee is my hero, a journalistic knight in shining armour. To tone down the metaphor, she can usually be relied upon to hit any nail squarely on the head. But nobody is perfect, and even the best-placed and best-intentioned thumb occasionally sports a bruise. Her column last Thursday, "The nature of our DNA will always lag behind nurture", must pass without correction, and I offer it in a spirit of pained admiration.

Owing to some weeks' delay in publication of the newspaper, world-renowned geneticists write their own headings, so Polly Toynbee can not be blamed for: "Genetic testing is pointless. Our fates are more likely to be shaped by our postcodes". Nevertheless, it is an accurate reflection of what she wrote.

But even if the postcode remark were true, gene testing wouldn't be pointless. Insurance actuaries would still want to read our genes, just as they record our smoking habits though the link between smoking and disease is statistical, not absolute. Both genes and smoking contribute to your risk. Nature and nurture are not competitions such that one wins and the other loses.

She gives the game away when she misuses the word "predictor": "Even those genes that show a strong disposition to specific conditions such as heart disease are not predictors. If those who know they are in danger eschew a diet of fried Mars bars they will not die of heart disease."

But we can simultaneously say, without contradiction: Even those environmental factors that show a strong disposition to specific conditions such as heart disease are not predictors. If you are fortunate in your genes you can eat fried Mars bars all day and you won't die of heart disease.

Both diet and genes contribute to the probability of heart disease. So do other factors such as stress. In the real world, prediction means statistical prediction, prediction of probability. When a tipster recommends a particular horse, he weights up the past form of all the horses, adding in rumours and stable lad gossip, together with expectations about the "going" (which in turn depend upon statistical weather forecasts). The result is a probability. On average you'll win more by following a good tipster than by betting completely at random.

When a successful racehorse is sold for stud, his purchaser is betting (lots of) money on a statistical prediction about the horse's genes. If there never had been genes for racing ability in horses, there wouldn't be a separate breed of racehorses at all. By analogy, there wouldn't be separate breeds of trotting horses, carthorse polo ponies, sheepdogs, gundogs or fighting bulls.

It's a slippery thing, anti-Semitism, not least so for those of us who are not Jewish. There are two intermingled issues: a straightforward one of prejudice and a more intangible one of mere awareness – people seem to divide into those who notice whether someone is Jewish or not and those who are largely blind to the fact. Perhaps nations do too.

Until now we might have thought old lines had become blurred. Conservatives may once have shouted "Shylock" at Disraeli but some of the most powerful British advocates in recent times for Zionism have been right-wing Conservatives. And Mrs Thatcher, who was said to have had more Etonians than Etonians in her Cabinet, was according to Nigel Lawson's memoirs "without the faintest

(or whatever you want to call the qualities that separate us from our ancestors) have been favoured in the gene pool. No evolutionary change in X can take place unless there are genes for X varying in the population. It follows that, during the millions of years in which we have been pulling ahead of our ape ancestors, some of us have been brighter than others, and it has been predictable from our genes. To deny that, you must deny Darwinism, something that a person of Polly Toynbee's education and intelligence will not do, however tempted by liberal good intentions.

Genes are important causal agents, combining with other genes and with environmental agents in the statistical determination of our abilities. The way in which they combine is best understood in terms of the statistical technique called "analysis of variance".

Improvement in our understanding of the world is equivalent to an increase in our ability to predict outcomes as we take into account more causal agents. Equivalently, our uncertainty is progressively reduced, measured as increasing proportions of variance explained.

Variance is a measure of how variable a population is, and therefore how ignorant we are about any random member of it. The total variance

is the sum of variance due to diet, due to education, due to genes, due to this, that or the other, plus finally a residue of unexplained variance. If all you know is that I am human, your best guess of my ability to run a mile is that I am average for the whole population. But your confidence is negligible. The population includes everything from aged cripes to babes in arms: the variance is large, and at this stage it all lies in the unexplained residue.

Now tell you that I am male, in my twenties and in regular training, your confidence increases as portions of variance are shifted from unexplained residue to explained categories. If I now tell you that my father is called Roger Bannister, your estimate and your confidence change again. With each new piece of information, whether genetic or environmental, the unexplained variance decreases and the accuracy of the prediction increases.

There is a complication. Not all variance is "additive". Sometimes there are "interactions".

In the statistical sense, this means something other than addition, and it is often treated as equivalent to multiplication.

If a boy is very slightly cleverer than his brother for genetic reasons, the difference may be just enough to push him, but not his brother, through the eleven-plus and into grammar school. The eventual result of this may be that one brother becomes a professor, the other an unemployed labourer.

The difference in their genes is nowhere near

enough to account for the final difference in worldly success. It has been multiplied by a threshold effect, the eleven-plus examination.

The genes' contribution to the variance is no longer simply additive. There is a "genes x education" interaction. In the full analysis of variance, the total variance is partitioned into its additive components (genes, diet, education, etc) plus all the interactions (genes x education, genes x diet, education x diet, etc).

Once again, there is a residue of unexplained variance, but we have reduced it by subtraction not ever of the additive components but of the interactions too.

Interaction is a technical expression of

what we see as "unfair" or "double jeopardy".

Some people are disadvantaged by their genes and this will affect their lives and their health.

That's bad enough. If insurance companies are allowed to use this information to penalise them again, they will end up penalised twice.

Polly Toynbee is right – and typically so – to call for legal sanctions to make insurers spread the risk. Spreading risk is, after all, what insurance is all about. But we shan't help anybody, and might play into the hands of unscrupulous insurers, if we falsely underestimate the importance of genes.

From Shylock to the Scot Rifkind

Anti-semitism is a slippery thing, at home or abroad, says Paul Vallely

Some news reports register intellectual. Others hit the stomach with a thud. When I heard that a leading German newspaper had referred to the British Foreign Secretary as "the Jew Rifkind" I felt it viscerally.

It's a slippery thing, anti-Semitism, not least so for those of us who are not Jewish. There are two intermingled issues: a straightforward one of prejudice and a more intangible one of mere awareness – people seem to divide into those who notice whether someone is Jewish or not and those who are largely blind to the fact. Perhaps nations do too.

Until now we might have thought old lines had become blurred. Conservatives may once have shouted "Shylock" at Disraeli but some of the most powerful British advocates in recent times for Zionism have been right-wing Conservatives. And Mrs Thatcher, who was said to have had more Etonians than Etonians in her Cabinet, was according to Nigel Lawson's memoirs "without the faintest

trace of anti-Semitism in her make-up".

Yet there was quite a stir when

The Sunday Telegraph ran an investigation into the Jews in the Thatcher administration. And Alan Clark's Diaries revealed talk at eminent Tory tables about there being "too many Jews" in the Thatcher Cabinet. Others report continuing remarks in high Tory circles today – always more in sorrow than in anger – about why neither Rifkind nor Howard could ever become party leader.

The fact is that any mere statement on race is never mere. Just

to speak some things aloud invites

inferences about divided loyalties

and much else. The line between

prejudice and political correctness

is sometimes a hard one to pick.

Many German commentators

insist this is a fuss about nothing.

The 28-year-old German journalist who used the phrase claims that she was merely remarking on the irony of a Jewish Briton quoting a German Protestant (Luther) in a speech in Germany whose real audience was back in the UK. Perhaps so, though it was pity she used the term *der Juden* popularised by Goebbels rather than the more neutral *juda*.

The ensuing row points to something deeper. "We are no longer anti-Semitic," a German musician is supposed to have told an English violinist. "We have 15 Jews in this orchestra. How many do you have in yours?" It may be decency or just wishful-thinking that blinds us to knowing the answer.

We must only hope that we are not simply averting our eyes from something we need to root out.

the commentators

Could you please not repeat the question?

1. Have you noticed that newspapers used to commission and print opinion poll results the whole time, but that even in advance of the coming election there don't seem to be any? No, I hasn't. Yes, I have. Yes, and isn't it wonderful to be spared?

2. For instance, the Wirral South by-election is only days away but nobody seems to have delayed us with the usual poll soundings. We have had so far is the rough findings of canvassers and a defiant shake of the white flag from "Dr" Brian Mawhinney. But no polls. Why not, do you think?

Because the polls got it wrong at the last election that the papers don't want to burn their fingers again. Because the polls got it right at the last election and then people changed their minds after reading the poll results and before voting, thus making it look as if the polls were wrong. Because Tony Blair are sick of Blair being so far ahead all the time and would rather not even print the polls.

Because the papers have finally tumbled to the fact that polls are not news and nobody gives a toss about them. The absence of polls is very curious, because the British have always loved indulging in speculation. Politicians are always being asked how they think the vote will go. The public is always wasting its money phoning in to vote on matters they cannot possibly affect. Cricketers and football managers are always being asked to predict the result of fixtures. The Lottery is all about forecasting things, and so are football pools and astrology, and so are all those programmes on BBC which show the build-up to Five Nations rugby internationals, although that might be a bit different, because international rugby is about the only sport that the BBC has still got hold of, so they have to milk it dry until everyone is bored silly, but the question remains: Although we still love speculation, have we actually got fed up with polls themselves?

Yes. No. We haven't. It's just that we are fed up being asked the wrong questions.

4. How do you mean, being asked the wrong questions? Well, the pollsters only ever ask questions like: If there were an election tomorrow, which party would you vote for? Or, which of the three party leaders do you rate most highly? Or, if John Major stepped down,

There you go again. Asking excruciatingly simple-minded questions. The answer is that, like most things, polls can be good or bad. It all depends on the context. But of course you can't get a good headline out of a statement beginning "It all depends..." Which may be why polls are not much in evidence these days. Because, far from being too simple for us, they are actually too sophisticated for most voters. *If you agree, phone Yes. If you disagree, phone No. If you don't know what this is all about, wait till the election comes along and serve you right.*

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Antonio de
Almeida

Institutions left awash with cash following a flood of buy-backs

Ken Clarke, the Chancellor, may have scrapped the tax benefits attached to share buy-backs and special dividend schemes, but they remain a symbol of financial vitality in the corporate sector.

Last week alone, banking giant Barclays, advertising agency WPP, leisure conglomerate Rank Group and haulier Christian Salvesen all unveiled plans to repurchase shares worth a total of almost £1bn.

The received wisdom is that a net injection of liquidity from buy-backs is good for the stock market. Certainly share repurchases have been a significant factor behind the rise and rise of the US and, to a less obvious extent, the UK markets.

But there are signs the initial enthusiasm for buy-backs is beginning to wear thin. Shares in Barclays, for example, still fell sharply after its results last week, despite suggestions that another repurchase of its equity was on the cards.

While buy-backs are a response to the problem of what to do with surplus cash in a low interest rate environment, they are also an admission that companies can think of nothing better to do with the cash in business terms than to give it back to shareholders.

"In itself, that is not a positive message to be putting across," stockbroker Charterhouse Tilney argues in its latest review.

The involuntary increase in liquidity comes at a time when institutions are already awash with cash – double the normal proportion of total assets, Charterhouse says.

Some of this should be moppped up by imminent building society and mutual assurance flotation, while cash-strapped companies may come in hand to take advantage of available liquidity through rights issues.

That said, government funding, through tapping the gilt market, is falling as the public

sector borrowing requirement improves, leaving investors wondering where to park their cash.

Overall, it looks as share buy-backs in themselves do nothing to resolve the underlying problem that the return on cash is low. The problem, Charterhouse contends, is merely transferred to fund managers.

Whether this will see more buy-backs announced remains to be seen. What is clear is that a veritable spring tide of company results, led by financials, will engulf investors this week but with the London stock market testing its record high-water tide-mark, any disappointment could leave shareholders high and dry.

Friday's profit-taking among financial stocks may be a foretaste of things to come.

Adverse currency factors could cause more than a few ripples of concern. Among the insurers, a buoyant life sector has lifted shares in Commercial Union to new highs in recent

weeks. But NatWest reckons CU is vulnerable to profit-taking with the shares standing at 16 per cent premium to their net asset value and vulnerable

to profits downgrades given sterling's further gains against continental currencies since the December year-end. Underlying operating profits to be unveiled on Wednesday are expected to show a fall from £509m in 1995 to anywhere between £415m and £465m.

On the same day Prudential posts its 1996 figures. While

these should be perfectly acceptable – operating profit up 10 per cent to £285m – the main focus of attention will be on what the Pru has to say about its £1.9bn bid for Scottish Amicable, which rival Abbey National, reporting the next day, has promised to trump in what has become a cut and run race.

ScotAm has given its var-

ious suitors until Friday to come up with their final indicative bids.

Abbey, too, should produce a double-digit improvement in profits with NatWest penning in £1142m (£1020m) at the pre-tax level. However, the broker believes the valuation of both shares is looking stretched after their strong performance in recent months.

Just as topical will be final re-

sults from Standard Chartered on Wednesday. The bank's prospects for earnings growth are underpinned by market conditions in Hong Kong, so its assessment of how

the death of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping will affect the colony's handing over to Peking this summer will be watched with extra interest. Strong growth in Standard's core Asian franchise should enable

pre-tax profits to jump by about a third to £275m.

Still in financial services,

profits from high-street clearing

business

order book, rising profits from the European Airbus consortium and reduced losses from regional aircraft. Pre-tax profits should come in around £440m versus £330m last time.

The lights will finally go out on British Gas on Thursday. Its last set of results will be something of an irrelevance as the company has ceased to exist following the demerger into Centrica, the domestic and industrial gas supplier, and BG, the pipeline arm.

Assuming the opportunity is taken to wipe the slate clean British Gas could even make a loss after exceptional items.

It will also be the end of an era for Redland today when the building materials group is ejected from the FTSE 100 index. It will be replaced by Energy Group, one of the businesses born of the Hanson demerger which includes Eastern, the regional electricity company. The Hanson rump will remain a FTSE 100 constituent.

British Aerospace

will be the composite insurer incurs hefty restructuring costs from integrating recently acquired businesses.

Full-year results from

British Aerospace on Wednesdays are likely to reflect the huge financial strides made by the company over the past few years as the civil and defence markets continue to consolidate.

Analysts expect positive

news about a growing defence

share

NatWest are set to fall by

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reflecting a number of one-off

factors. These include a £690m

accounting loss on the disposi-

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mercial and retail banking arm,

and a special restructuring

charge of £206m to be partially

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Also on Friday, operating

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business & city

Business news desk tel 0171-298 2636 fax 0171-298 2098

BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

'Windfalls will be saved not spent'

JILL TREANOR
Banking Correspondent

Only one in eight of the 19 million recipients of the £21bn worth of shares to be given away by the converting building societies will cash in their shares straightaway, subduing the "feel-good factor" and easing the mounting pressure on the Chancellor to raise interest rates.

According to a survey by Mori and analysis by Salomon Brothers, the windfalls will be

saved rather than spent and will add just 0.5 per cent to consumption rates. Those windfalls which are spent would be used for foreign holidays and home improvements, with smaller sums spent on consumer durables, cars and clothes, the survey found.

Initial forecasts from City economists had put the boost to consumption at 1.0 per cent or more, leading many to predict a boost to the feel-good factor in the run up to the general election. While only Alliance &

Leicester will have paid out its share bonanza before the election, the others - Woolwich, Northern Rock and Halifax - follow in quick succession.

The 9 million or so members of Halifax vote today on the society's £1.4bn flotation plans, which on its own provides the single biggest boost to share ownership in the UK.

The effect of the Halifax's payout in June, when 8.5 million people will receive shares worth an average of £1,300 each, combined with the windfalls from

the other societies, has been complicating economists' forecasts for spending, economic growth and inflation over the next year or so.

The sheer scale of the bonanza is the problem as, theoretically, if all the shares were cashed in at once, the payouts would be equivalent to a temporary 11p cut in the basic income tax rate.

If all of the windfalls are spent, adding about 40 per cent to consumption, there would be massive knock-on effects on capacity use, prices and the current accounts, the Salomon researchers said.

group expect to receive free shares.

The Mori poll established that, in general, the people expecting to receive windfalls were middle-aged and richer than the overall population.

More significantly, when broken down in social class

- used as a proxy for income and wealth - the survey showed that 45 per cent of the high income A8 group expect to benefit from the payout. Just 17 per cent of the DE, low income,

groups expect to receive free shares.

The biggest payouts are also expected to go to people who are middle-aged, richer and more financially sophisticated, which suggests that a large proportion of the funds will be saved rather than spent.

The survey showed that only 12 per cent, or one in eight, of those who expect to receive a windfall would sell their shares immediately, while a similar number intended to sell the shares over the next 12 months.

But numbers that only 10 to 15 per cent of the windfalls will be spent much lower than the 25 per cent which had been used for previous estimates.

According to the Salomon analysis this suggested that current estimates of GDP growth of 3.4 per cent may now be too high and that interest rates may only need to rise by half a percentage point, rather than the 0.75 expected at the moment.

The survey results - and assuming that sterling stays around current levels - till the

odds in favour of a total hike of 0.5 per cent," the research said.

Hatifax's special general meeting at the Sheffield Arena today is likely to see protests from disabled groups that are furious over the denial of payments to people whose accounts are held in trust.

But even though more than 50 per cent of the society's investing members - more than 3.3 million - must vote in favour for the flotation to proceed, such protests are unlikely to derail Halifax's flotation plans.

DTI tries to ban former Barings directors

JILL TREANOR

Former senior directors of Barings, the bank which collapsed in 1995, face being banned from acting as company directors for up to 15 years as a result of action being taken by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

A spokeswoman for the DTI said the office had issued summonses last Friday against Andrew Tuckey, the former deputy chairman of the bank, and nine other former directors including Peter Norris, the former chief executive.

The DTI is also seeking to ban Ian Hopkins, the former head of risk at Barings, and Ron Baker, the immediate boss of Nick Leeson, the trader based in Singapore who broke the bank by running up unauthorised trading losses of more than £800m.

Leeson was jailed in Singapore in 1995 after admitting charges of fraud.

The DTI action is being taken under the Company Directors Disqualification Act, which can lead to bans from directly or indirectly forming, promoting or managing companies for 15 years.

The former directors have been the subject of disciplinary procedures by the Securities and Futures Authority (SFA), the City watchdog.

Some of them, including Mr Norris, have been banned from working in the City in management roles for periods of up to three years.

But Mr Baker succeeded in fighting an attempt by the regulator to ban him after a disciplinary tribunal at the SFA cleared him of four out of five charges.



Albert Scardino: Unable to line up a new team of backers after Mercury Asset Management withdrew from the consortium's £20m bid

Photograph: Empics

Scardino pulls out of Forest bid battle

Nigel Cope

The bid battle for Nottingham Forest became a one-horse race yesterday after the dramatic last-minute collapse of the consortium led by US journalist Al

bert Scardino.

His £20m bid disintegrated when his main backer, Mercury Asset Management (MAM), pulled out citing nervousness about the prospects for football shares.

MAM said it was withdrawing because of the possible deterioration of the market for

football shares over the next 18 months - a decision which could have a knock-on effect on other quoted football clubs.

With Forest looking to float, MAM said this could have jeopardised the value of its investment.

After MAM made its shock decision late on Friday evening, Mr Scardino spent the rest of the weekend trying unsuccessfully to line up replacement backers including other City institutions and Porterbrook leasing millionaire Sandy Anderson.

Mr Scardino finally conceded

defeat yesterday lunchtime, leaving the way clear for the group led by Nigel Wray, Irving Scholar and local author Phil Soar, to win shareholder approval for its £19.3m offer.

It will now be the only bid on the table when Forest shareholders meet tonight for the crunch vote to decide the future of the club.

However, a victory is far from a foregone conclusion as the bid needs a 75 per cent majority to win control.

Commenting on the sudden evaporation of his deal, Mr

Scardino said: "It's very, very disappointing but I'm proud of what we have achieved over the last six weeks."

Mr Scardino claimed he had won backing from around 140 of Forest's 202 shareholders, bringing himself within touching distance of the majority needed.

"We'd won the campaign and then our general withdrew from the field," he said.

He had been forced to change the structure of his bid at the last minute after criticism from shareholders that MAM

and Electra Fleming, the bid's other backer, would have been able to cash in their entire investment in Forest when the club floated.

The Wray-Scholar-Soar camp was avoiding expressions of over-confidence yesterday and was instead lobbying shareholders ahead of tonight's vote.

Mr Soar, a boyhood Forest fan, said yesterday: "We hope we will be able to convince shareholders that we are the people to take this club forward."

Forest fans are desperate for

the bid battle to reach a conclusion ahead of next month's transfer deadline. With the club languishing near the foot of the Premiership it urgently needs the injection of new funds to buy players.

The club's 202 shareholders paid just £1 for their stakes in the club. They are a disparate group, including wealthy local businessmen, pub owners and former players. They all qualify for shareholder privileges such as a free cup of tea at half time, a free programme and a cushion on which to sit to view the games.

Yorkshire Electricity stalked by US giant

Peter Rodgers
Financial Editor

An American power company is believed to be considering a surprise £1.4bn bid for Yorkshire Electricity, the last but one of the regional electricity companies (RECs) in England and Wales to maintain its independence.

The potential predator is American Electric Power (AEP), one of the largest electricity companies in the US. A successful takeover would leave Southern Electric as the only independent REC among the 12 which were privatised in 1990.

A spokesman for Yorkshire

said: "This is still market speculation and it is Yorkshire Electricity's policy not to comment on market speculation."

However, executives were in their offices yesterday as news of AEP's interest broke in a Sunday newspaper, fuelling speculation that discussions are under way and that an announcement one way or the other may be out this week. Yorkshire is advised by Rothschild.

The report claimed an offer of 860p a share in cash was expected, though this is a premium of only 12.5p to Friday's closing price. The shares were up 3.5p at the close on Friday at 818.5p, well below the 1996 high of

898p. Analysts have not expected a bid so close to a general election as it would be touch and go whether the present Government could approve it before polling day.

It would probably take an agreed bid on the table within days to have much chance of squeezing through, and it is thought unlikely that Yorkshire would succumb to the first offer. Most electricity companies have been sold after considerable haggling about the price.

Yorkshire Electricity, whose chief executive is Malcolm Chatwin, has insisted in the past that the company will not agree to informal talks and will only

meet a potential predator if an offer is put first in writing.

Labour has been hostile towards the merger boom in the electricity sector, and might find a way to refer a bid for one of the last two independent RECs if it forms the next government.

However, a referral would not be straightforward, because it is hard to see how it could be justified on competition grounds when a bid comes from an electricity supplier abroad.

Labour has also reportedly backed away from plans to impose a public interest test on mergers, another way Yorkshire could be referred.

Of the RECs, Northern, East

Midlands, South Western, London, Seabord and Midlands have been taken over by American companies.

Electricity companies snapped up by UK predators include Manweb, which went for £1bn to ScottishPower, Eastern, which went to Hanson for £2.5bn, Norweb, which went to North West Water for £1.8bn, and Swalec, bought by Welsh Water for £872m.

Leds-based Yorkshire Electricity has been seen as a takeover target for some time, although last year Christopher Hampson, the chairman, said he saw no competitive disadvantage in staying independent.

Malcolm Chatwin: A £1.4bn bid is rumoured

IN BRIEF

- The Penguin executive in the US who cost Pearson, the company's owner, £100m in losses, has been identified as Christina Galatia, a former credit manager in the New Jersey offices. She is alleged to have given unauthorised discounts to booksellers.

- NatWest has emerged as a contender in the bidding war for Scottish Amicable, joining Prudential, Abbey National and AMP in the contest. It has signed a confidentiality agreement that allows access to the sale documents. A NatWest spokesman said the group was interested in making an acquisition in the long-term savings and investment market. But City sources pointed out that NatWest had pulled out of previous bids for life insurers and may be deterred by the escalating prices being offered for ScotAm.

- Interest rates were set to rise to 7.5 per cent by the end of the year from their current level of 6 per cent, but would remain unchanged in the run-up to the general election, Barclays Bank said. A change of government following the election would not alter the outlook for a rise in rates, the bank said.

- Harrods is understood to have abandoned plans for a flotation that could have valued the store at up to £2bn. The decision to change course comes after spending a substantial amount of money investigating a possible flotation, hiring Salomon Brothers, the investment bank, and Cazenove, the brokers.

- Mondex UK, the electronic cash card company, is taking a 10 per cent stake in Girovend, the cashless systems business due to float next month. The move will give Mondex access to Girovend's 3 million customers, mostly businesses which issue Girovend cards to staff for use in canteens and vending machines.

- London Bridge Software is to seek a full listing on the Stock Exchange within the next month or so. The company is to raise more than £10m, most of which will be reinvested in the business. The listing is to be sponsored by Deloitte & Touche corporate finance. London Bridge supplies software for credit management and automated credit risk scoring.

- Ultra Electronics Holdings has won a £48m contract to supply acoustic systems for the British Aerospace Nimrod 2000, the next generation of maritime patrol aircraft for the Royal Air Force.

- The rump businesses of Hanson, the industrial conglomerate, will be reborn as "new Hanson" today. Trading in shares in the company and in The Energy Group begins tomorrow, marking the end of the two-year process of breaking up the organisation. Shareholders approved the demerger of The Energy Group, which includes Hanson's coal and electricity interests, on Friday.

STOCK MARKETS						
FTSE 100						
4486	-4.2	-0.1	4357.40	3632.30	3.63	
4536.80	+25.0	+0.5	4633.50	4015.30	3.37	
4582	+0.8	+0.0	2142.60	1816.60	3.58	
4587.56	+8.6	+0.4	2347.56	1954.06	2.91	
4591.45	+1.3	+0.1	2122.75	1791.95	3.92	
4613.53	-7.6	-1.1	7067.48	5022.94	1.92	
4630.54	+312.5	+1.7	2266.80	1739.65	0.66	
4644.85	+331.6	+2.5	1398.24	1020.82	3.18	
4649.09	-64.1	-2.0	3278.16	2253.36	1.51	
Source: FT Information						

INTEREST RATES						
UK interest rates						
Benchmark yield curve 0-5 year gvt 1997	8.1					
21/02/97	8.1					
Month ago	8.0					



GAVYN DAVIES

'Forty per cent of UK youngsters never reach NVQ Level 2 – the equivalent of five good GCSEs. The answer is to spend more money to raise the standards of this part of the population, while saving money in higher education by transforming student grants into student loans'

An economist's view of what Labour can do

There seems to be little that annoys Gordon Brown and Tony Blair more than the suggestion that nothing can be accomplished by a New Labour government without increasing the total of public spending and borrowing. Nevertheless, this seems to be widely believed by British opinion formers, which is why a book published last Monday is very helpful. The book – *What Labour Can Do* by Professor Richard Layard of the London School of Economics (LSE) – outlines a programme of major and minor reforms that would cost only the modest amount of money which could comfortably be raised by the windfall tax on privatised utilities.

The title of Professor Layard's book is highly appropriate, since the author is the epitome of "can do" economists. While much of the profession is characterised by "can't do" types, Professor Layard never analyses a problem without suggesting how it can be alleviated by feasible policy changes. His list of practical accomplishments is already legion. The Centre for Labour Economics at the LSE was established by him as the leading research grouping on the subject in Europe, and it has now developed into the wider-ranging Centre for Economic Performance. Professor Layard was also the prime mover behind the launch of the Employment Institute and Charter for Jobs in the 1980s, organisations which were in the wilderness for many years, but which eventually helped change the tide of opinion on the unemployment problem in this country. After that,

Professor Layard decided that the biggest challenge faced by macro-economists lay in the transition economies, so he upped sticks and moved to Russia, to assist the process of reform. As all his colleagues will testify, perseverance is his middle name.

I first encountered Professor Layard in Jim Callaghan's Policy Unit. We were looking for new ideas to fill the 1979 Labour Manifesto, and Professor Layard was suggesting that a job guarantee should be offered by the government to all those who had been unemployed continuously for more than 12 months. The unit felt that this would prove an important initiative, since it would raise the cost to the government of allowing long-term unemployment to rise, and would therefore force other policies across Whitehall to be adjusted to this requirement. Somewhat to our surprise, Jim Callaghan agreed, and the pledge made its first appearance in a Labour manifesto that year. It has been something of a hasty perennial since then in opposition documents, but sadly this has never persuaded the public, or the Conservative government, to support the idea. Perhaps 1997 will be the year, and if the New Labour plan eventually succeeds in eliminating long-term unemployment for those aged under 25, much of the credit should go to Professor Layard.

What Labour Can Do explains in some detail how this job guarantee can be implemented via a combination of employment subsidies and job creation projects. Also in

the area of "welfare to work", Professor Layard argues for an expansion of in-work benefits, especially Family Credit, and for a minimum wage, set at a relatively low level of perhaps £5.25 a week, designed to help roughly 5 per cent of the working population. He recognises, however, that these solutions will only work in the context of a concerted programme to improve skill levels for the least educated segment of our population. He points out that in the UK, 40 per cent of British youngsters never reach National Vocational Qualification Level 2, the equivalent of five good GCSEs. This means that we have twice the number of unqualified workers as Germany and France.

by a government which accepts that it has a social responsibility to help those who have dropped out of the education net prematurely. But by the same token, it cannot be acceptable for young people to receive benefit while refusing to take up offers of help from the State. Provided that the nature of this hardship is clearly explained to the rest of the population – that voluntary idleness at the public expense is never an option – such an initiative could generate wide electoral support.

The book also argues for modest stakeholder-type policies to discourage the culture of short-termism and hostile takeovers which permeates British industry. These would include enhanced compensation for workers laid off after a merger, much tougher competition policy (eg making price fixing illegal), the introduction of a Council of Institutional Investors to undertake efficiency audits of underperforming firms and the like. But there would be no wholesale changes in company law, or in the duties of directors, which some supporters of the shareholder system would like to see adopted.

On macro-economic policy, Professor Layard argues under the heading of "no more boom and bust" for a series of measures to enhance stability in the monetary and fiscal field, including independence for the Bank of England, followed immediately by first-wave membership of EMU. There would be no attempt to reduce the share of public spending or tax in GDP, since Professor Layard views this as irrelevant for growth, but

there would be a gradual privatisation of the pension system.

What are the common threads that lie behind these ideas? The first is that plenty can be done to change and improve the workings of the economy without resorting to tax and spend. The second is that we still have something to learn from the way that things are done in the rest of Europe.

This latter notion is not fashionable, especially following the recent surge in unemployment in Germany. There are serious problems with the structure of the labour market on the Continent and several of our neighbours are reluctantly moving in the direction of the Anglo-Saxon model in this area. But, as this column pointed out a few weeks ago, we should not get too mesmerised by short-term cyclical developments, since long-term comparisons between Europe, America and the UK on growth, productivity and inflation remain unflattering to our system. On this, Will Hutton makes a sensible point – we are not forced to copy all the mistakes which the Germans and French have made, but there are many elements of their system which would enhance our own.

Also we should recognise that not everything done in America need be slavishly copied in the rest of the world. Ten years ago, copying America would have been considered insane. Professor Layard suggests – controversially – that it still is.

What Labour Can Do by Professor Richard Layard, published by Warner Books at £19.99

Orange targets big-spending business travellers with globally mobile phone

Peter Rodgers

The Orange network is to offer a mobile phone that can be used in more than 50 countries by the end of this year, from Lithuania and Slovenia to New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

The new phones, the latest

offering in an increasingly fierce marketing war with Vodafone, have been developed with Motorola. They allow calls to be made on either of the two main types of digital network in common use, GSM1800 and GSM900, and are claimed to be the basis of the first truly international phone network.

The dual-mode Motorola m601 phones will cost 15 to 25 per cent more than conventional models, and start at about £125. Orange claimed it would have a lead of three to four months on its competitors in introducing the dual-mode technology, which searches out the correct frequency automatically.

They are aimed at enticing big-spending business travellers away from Vodafone and Cellnet. Orange customers will receive one bill itemising calls made in any of the 50 countries.

Orange customers can now call in 10 countries and the plan is to extend this "roaming" capability to at least 24 by the end

of April, almost 40 by the end of August and more than 50 by the year-end. For the first time, British mobile phone owners will be able to use their equipment in North America.

Hans Snook, managing director of Orange, said: "This is another step in our ambition to allow our customers to use

Orange through one phone on one number at home, in the office, or abroad."

Orange now has more than 785,000 subscribers and its UK coverage has grown to 92 per cent of the population.

Forecasts for growth of the British mobile phone market were raised last month after

record figures for subscribers numbers were released by the two all-digital networks, Orange and One2One, helping Orange shares recover after a lacklustre few months.

Orange added 125,000 customers to its networks between October and December, including an encouraging Christ-

mas, its highest quarterly connections figures.

The network also grabbed 29 per cent of all new customers in the market last year, compared with 15 per cent in 1995. Orange claims to be in second place behind Vodafone, with more than 1 million digital customers, but ahead of Cellnet and One2One.

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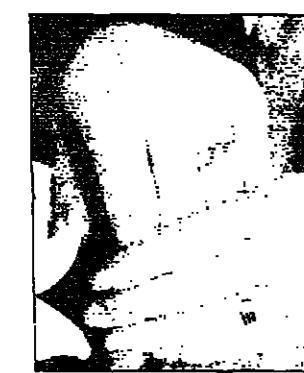
Monday 24 February 1997 the week starts here



Katharine Hamnett
Still provoking in her fashion



Adam Mars-Jones
reviews Jane Campion's *Portrait of a Lady*



Marriage
New ways to mend it

Pick 'n' mix

Theatre: If Mark Ravenhill's play 'Shopping And Fucking' left you Hopping and Clucking, best stay away from his new one. For the rest of us, 'Faust', opening tomorrow at the Lyric Studio in Hammersmith, promises to be a quite stunning show, mixing video and French philosopher Michel Foucault's musings with big ideas about God and man. Tickets are still available for every performance, but are going fast. Mon-Fri 8pm, Sat matinée 4.30pm. Mon £5, Tues-Sat £8.50. £3 conc. Box office: 0171-412311.

B there

Film: Tim Burton rescues alarmist alien movies from the B-list with *Mars Attacks* – a spoof on the hysterical behaviour of Hollywood's finest (the cast includes Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close and



Danny DeVito) as an alien invasion terrorises the planet. At cinemas nationwide from Friday.

No contest

Opera: If you're torn between Jonathan Miller's current Così fan Tutti or his Der Rosenkavalier, both running in London at the moment, just make sure you get to both. But hurry – the latter finishes at the London Coliseum on Saturday. A wonderful cast, including John Tomlinson and Yvonne Kenny, gives a sumptuous evocation of 19th-century Vienna. 5.30pm. Tickets £8-£20. Box office: 071-632 8300.

Baroque and roll

Classical: Start your week in style tonight with Handel, a composer who never goes out of fashion, sung and played by the best exponents of his art – Anne Murray and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Queen Elizabeth Hall, London SE1, 7.45pm. Tickets £8-£20. Box office: 071-960 4242.

Never mind the buttocks

Popping: Don't miss the annual pop back-slapping ceremony – the Brit Awards – tonight on ITV at 8pm. Delight suffused the press room and homes across the land last year after Jarvis Cocker's riotous hand-grabbing antics. Possible winners include newcomers Kula Shaker, the Spice Girls (surprise, surprise), dance act the Prodigy and production wizard Tricky. This year's live performance, thankfully free of preposterous pseudodeities, will be a duet by Diana Ross and Jamiroquai's Jay.

Reel heroines

Festival: Strong and sassy women feature throughout Witty Women of Hollywood, the National Film Theatre festival of comedy in March. Stars include Alicia Silverstone, Marilyn Monroe, Whoopi Goldberg and Mae

West – fast-talking women whose zappy dialogue did anything but dilute their sex appeal. Tickets are selling fast. NFT, London SE1. Box office: 0171-928 3232.

Corking caper

Buying: Sotheby's first Formula One memorabilia auction on Wednesday offers an update on what happened to Damon Hill's victory champagne bottle (opened) when he became the world's best racing driver last year. 2.30pm.

Rhyme or reason

Travel (1): Hear creativity among the crescents at Bath's third literary festival. Today's offering includes Beryl Bainbridge and Jonathan Coe in discussion. The rest of the week mixes poetry and music. Box office: 01225 463362.

Travel (2 Jar): Otherwise, you could get your priorities right and go on holiday. For more sun and less semantics buy 14 nights in Barbados, departing on the 25th from Gatwick, for just £569. Call Page & May 0116 250 7116.

Half and half

Jazz performance: Only a few tickets remain for A Slow Drag, the true-life story of



Porchester Centre, London W2, 7-9pm. Call Roger on 0181-960 3994

Vanishing breed
Remind yourself of that shrinking band of building societies that remain under mutual status with today's special general meeting at the Sheffield Arena to decide the Halifax Building Society's future.

65 and counting

The Government looks to be facing ritual defeat in the Wirral South by-election on Thursday, followed by exchanges as predictable as a church service. "Mid-term protest," Stephen Dorrell will say, "Ringend endorsement of New Labour." Tony Blair will reply.

The rest of us get our chance for an "Amen" (or not) on 1 May, now only 65 days away.

Hard reign

Theatre: Can anyone recall a woman playing the part of King Lear in a major British theatre? What's more, a woman best known for mine? Enter Kathryn Hunter, star of Theatre de Complicite, who takes the lead at the Haymarket Theatre Leicester. Until 15 March. Tickets £6-£12.50 Tues-Thu, £6-£14.50 Fri-Sat. Box office: 0116 253 9797.

Research: James Aufenast, Gráinne Hehir

jazz

musician Billy Tipton – he who was actually a she – played out by musicians and actors at the Freedom Cafe, Wardour St, London W1. Tickets £6-£9. 8pm Tuesday and Thursday; 6 and 9pm Fri-Sat. Until 15 March

Best medicine

Comedy: You've got to laugh, or at least pretend to. Contestants bid to be New Comedy Act of the Year at the Hackney Empire, London E8, on Saturday. Mark Lamarr hosts the grand final of an event previously won by David Baddiel. Tickets £5. 8pm. Box office: 0181-985 2424.

Take the plunge

Sport: Immerse yourself in a free "try dive" with the Sea Urchin club on Thursday. It's your last chance to submerge gratis, but if you like it, you might fancy following them to the south coast at the weekend. Learn to breathe through a tube at the

Research: James Aufenast, Gráinne Hehir

ACROSS

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By Portia														8
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